



Foundation for NC Future

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Domestic Violence

In the past year, there were 39,000 calls to the Charlotte Police Department about domestic violence abuse. And these were just the ones that were reported. There were 5,000 warrants issued, but Charlotte has only 5 police officers trained to handle domestic violence calls. That's a little like trying to plug the dam with your fingers. I am not casting aspersions or laying blame to anyone or any group. I'm saying, "we've got a problem here...let's get at it."

Domestic violence is, most often, the physical abuse of a wife or a child by a husband or a boyfriend. According to the Charlotte Observer, a new incident of domestic violence occurs every 9 seconds nationwide. Domestic violence cuts across all racial, religious, financial, and educational lines – rich and poor; blacks, whites, Indians; and Asians; professors and high school dropouts; Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews; lawyers, judges, policemen, and felons; Republicans and Democrats. It has to be terrifying to be a woman or a child and be put into that kind of fear on a regular basis. Oftentimes domestic abuse can arise from an overuse of drugs or alcohol. Police will tell you that a large number of murders that occur in private homes involve domestic abuse. In Charlotte 9 murders – or roughly 15% of the murders so far this year - have been attributed to domestic violence. Keep in mind that these statistics are only from Charlotte. It is hard to imagine what the numbers must be statewide. Thus it stands to reason that if we cracked down harder on domestic violence we might also be reducing the violent crime rate. We had great success in the 1990's with an experimental "Drug Court" in Charlotte and perhaps it's time we looked at innovative ways to ease the cycle of domestic abuse.

We all know that this crime of terror occurs much more than we talk about or even think about. We also know that for every report that is made and investigated another family suffers in silence, afraid to even call the police. My wife and I have three wonderful, vivacious daughters. I had the honor of walking one of them down the aisle this summer when she got married to a wonderful man. I know that happiness will follow her like sunshine. It saddens me deeply to understand that during that beautiful ceremony, close to 400 women and children in the United States were put in fear of their lives. That's just not right!

We need to shine a light on this issue in Charlotte; to encourage people to come forward and seek our protection or get help to try and stop the cycle of abuse; and to find ways to punish those abusers who have no desire to try and change their behavior. Charlotte needs to throw a lifeline to these families before they drown. Five police officers are not nearly enough – we can't look at anyone with a straight face and claim that we are getting that job done. Help involves more than just calling the police though. It requires a commitment from judges and prosecutors to punish the offenders. I cannot speak for, nor commit the state to a specific course of action. But I will commit to learning about domestic violence and sharing that information with the other senators and representatives from Mecklenburg and trying to find a specific course of action that we can all support and that the state might help us with. And then we can share what we've learned with the Gaston and Union and Cabarrus delegations because the problem is not just contained in Charlotte.

Charlotte can point proudly to many fine accomplishments that have put us amongst the top cities in this country...wouldn't it be great if we could also become known as a place where domestic abuse is not tolerated and a place where women and children are safe? We could literally be a lifesaver to the women and children who suffer the abuse in silence and fear. We can certainly do better than we have done. We can make it a priority and we can enlist all the other parts of the criminal justice system to help us because we all know that domestic violence is a huge problem and that protecting these folks is the right thing to do.

People and communities are known equally for what they do as well as what they don't do. It is time we brought this issue out of the darkness and shined the light on it.

All aboard?

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