



Celia Organista (holding paper) speaks at press conference.

Kurt Ellison

Closure of crisis center evokes bitter response

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Mismanagement, poor planning and lack of commitment to South County were among charges leveled yesterday at Women's Crisis Support administrators, in the wake of announced plans to close the agency's Watsonville office at 22 Sudden St. May 1.

Frustration over the closure was evident at a press conference called at that office both as a protest and to challenge Women's Crisis Support administrators and the community to work on reopening an office with expanded services, said Barbara Garcia.

Garcia, a member of an advisory committee formed last summer to examine the needs of Latino women in the Watsonville area, and other committee members said they felt insulted because they were not consulted before the decision was made to close the Watsonville office.

The committee worked long and hard on members' own time and was then ignored, said Celia Organista, who resigned her position last month on the agency's board of directors.

Members will meet later this week to decide what, if any, commitment they have toward continuing to support

the agency, Organista said.

Committee member Josie Negrete charged administrators with "tokenism." The Watsonville office, she said, had apparently been used "for show — to get the Latino numbers. But you know, we're sick of that."

Nora Hochman, executive director of the agency, has said the decision was made to close the office because funding has been slim in recent years and Women's Crisis Support can no longer afford the annual \$11,037 cost of keeping it open.

Apparently referring to statements Hochman made earlier, quoted in the newspaper, that the Watsonville office might not have closed had the Watsonville City Council contributed any money toward it since it opened in 1981, some people asked if the closure was politically motivated.

"I want to make it clear," said Charlene Shaffer, president of the agency's board of directors, "that this was not a political move engineered to put pressure on the Watsonville City Council."

Shaffer said later she had considered resigning from the board when the office closure was announced, but changed her mind in part because her term expires in June.

"I had real serious concerns about what would

happen here in South County," she said. "And then I decided that the best way I could serve the board and the residents of South County was to serve out my term."

However, she said she could not support plans to provide only six weekly hours of service to the Watsonville area.

Advisory committee members pointed out in a letter responding to the closure that 35 percent of women's shelter residents are from Watsonville, yet the city has only 13 percent of the county's population.

Hochman said she took very seriously concerns expressed by advocates of Watsonville services, and that every attempt is being made to find the money to fund more hours here.

Hochman also said, in a letter to the advisory committee and at the press conference, that she's hoping the committee and agency representatives can sit down and work out their differences. Trust and communication are "the bottom line" to coming up with a solution, she said.

Committee members, however, said they were not sure their trust could be salvaged.

"A lot of things have happened that have broken a trust that was very fragile to begin with," Organista said.