

SOS shelter bars visit by state coalition

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TEANECK — A state advocacy group for battered women wants to inspect the Shelter Our Sisters (SOS) home in Teaneck but has been denied access because of the group's ties to the shelter's former executive director.

As a result, the New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women, an advisory group that makes policy and funding recommendations to the state Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS), has revoked SOS's voting privileges in the coalition, said June Weaver, coalition administrator.

The coalition also has asked DYFS to conduct a special investigation of various complaints concerning the how SOS shelter is run.

SOS officials said they refused to allow the on-site inspection because of the coalition's links to the shelter's former executive director, Sandra Ramos, who was fired in January.

Elaine Meyerson, the shelter's new executive director, said the state coalition has supported Ms. Ramos in a lawsuit she filed against the SOS board after she was removed.

"We're in litigation, and they are partisan to Sandy. Therefore, I can't permit them inside the shelter," Ms. Meyerson said of the coalition. "As soon as the case is over, I have no problem letting

them in the shelter."

Ms. Ramos, who founded SOS, claims the board did not have cause when it fired her in January. The case is pending before Superior Court Judge Sherwin D. Lester in Hackensack.

Ms. Weaver said the shelter's voting rights would be reinstated once SOS agrees to a visit. SOS remains a member of the coalition. The coalition could recommend that DYFS discontinue funding to the shelter, but has no plans to do so at this time, Ms. Weaver said. Less than 50 percent of the shelter's annual \$345,000 budget comes from DYFS, said Ms. Meyerson.

Ms. Weaver would not say who made the complaints against SOS. Among the complaints the coalition took to DYFS are that the shelter's board of directors excludes battered women from membership on the board, and that administrators investigate clients' backgrounds.

Another complaint was about the shelter's practice of requiring mandatory psychological counseling for clients, Ms. Weaver said.

SOS is a private, nonprofit group with a shelter in Teaneck for 35 battered women and their children, and three homes for 30 people. DYFS spokeswoman Charlene Brown said her agency received "information" about SOS from the coalition, but would not comment further.

1986