

Mayor is firm: battered wives room elsewhere

By Nadine Joseph
Staff Writer

Hackensack's mayor says that though he sympathizes with battered wives, he doesn't want them housed in his city.

"Hackensack is always the dumping grounds for all of the county's programs," Hackensack Mayor Frank Zisa said last night.

The mayor was responding to mounting protests by Bergen women's groups over the city's passive but firm resistance to the establishment of a shelter.

Zisa said, "As far as Hackensack is concerned, we don't need a shelter. We're providing our share of services in the county, and I can't see why our taxpayers should always bear the expenses for others."

But one representative of a coalition of women's groups which wants the shelter for battered wives says that "if it were a shelter for dogs, no one in the city would oppose it."

After two months of exchanging polite letters, city officials and the women's groups are at each other's throats.

The women, who represent the county chapters of the National Council of Jewish Women, National Organization for Women, American Lutheran Church Women, and Black Women United, held a press conference in front of city hall yesterday afternoon to dramatize the need for the 316 Union St. shelter.

"Without a house for the battered wives to live in, there can be no effective program," said Gayle Eisen, a coalition spokeswoman.

The women plan to push for the establishment of the shelter by gathering support in Hackensack and lobbying for state and county help in overruling any continued opposition by local officials.

The county Community Action Program (CAP) has the money to provide services for battered wives — a \$174,000 federal grant — but no building in See MAYOR, Page C-5

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which to house victims of domestic violence.

"We're outraged that local leaders say they don't want the shelter in their city," said Ms. Eisen. "Before a public official says there is no need for the shelter, he should sit down with the program's director and find out what the program is all about."

The women see the City of Hackensack as the best place for the shelter because of its central location, its proximity to CAP headquarters, and the availability of transportation services for women who must work to support themselves and their children.

The county has been waiting for city approval for transfer of a rooming house license needed to establish the shelter. Before approving the transfer, the city would have to eliminate a controversial zoning ordinance clause which prohibits children in rooming houses.

The women's groups contend a shel-

ter for women and children who live in fear of their lives is more important than Hackensack's identity, fears that the city will become a dumping ground, and political considerations.

"We see a pressing problem," said Ina Miller of Teaneck. "The county is spending federal funds to put women up in motels, which is expensive."

"It's also a waste of money, since motel life is not a good alternative. Many of the women go back home to their husbands who continue beating them."

Phoebe Seham, a member of the county's Commission on the Status of Women and a founder of the Women's Rights Information Center in Hackensack, said a commission study showed that the unreported incidence of wife-beating in Bergen County is higher than that reported for all other violent crimes combined. She said 80 women have been aided or sheltered by the county CAP program over the past four months. In 1976, physicians treated 631 women after incidents of domestic violence.