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## Community splits on male director at women's agency

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In the three weeks since a Cape Cod battered women's agency appointed a male director, becoming the first in Massachusetts to do so, an ideological rebellion has split the agency's Hyannis headquarters.

The decision to name Richard Costa as head of Independence House, a model in the fight against domestic violence, has prompted four board members, including the president, to resign in protest, accusing the agency of betraying its feminist roots.

Social service leaders in Hyannis, suggesting Costa also lacks experience, are now calling for a meeting to explain his appointment.

And across the state, advocates have begun to take notice of the nasty rift, which has pitted two ends of the liberal spectrum against one another.

"If you've ever seen a woman who's been badly beaten, and she comes into an agency, the last thing she wants to see is a man," said Helen Goolishian, who resigned as president of the board. "They're hopefully not going to leave us feeling that way. But when they first come to us, they do. What we've got here is a difference of philosophy."

The differences have split an agency built on grass-roots solidarity during the early 1980s, when a group of women on Cape Cod united to create the first domestic violence shelter there.

At the time, the battered women's movement was itself just five years old. Independence House stated in its original mission that its goal was to "empower women," a phrase it considered a bedrock of the feminist ideal, Goolishian said.

In the two decades that followed, the agency grew into a \$ 1 million-a-year operation that now serves 1,000 clients a month, an expanding organization that requires large-scale fund-raising and grants. That transformation, some say, is a key reason the director's slot could be filled by either gender.

"He's not on the front line when someone's been battered," said Christine Kesten, the new board president. "He's there to do the management, the fund-raising, the grants. I thought we picked the person who was most qualified."

Costa, who graduated from Salem State College in 1975, has experience as a nurse and a business owner, but not as a domestic violence counselor, according to his resume.

Costa assumed the position of director on April 27, after the board voted, 5-4, in his favor. He did not return calls for comment yesterday.

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He was selected instead of Colleen Kramer, an attorney who was interim director for six months after the previous director resigned last fall.

Kramer, who like a third candidate has an advanced degree, was "young, energetic, enthusiastic" during her time as interim director, Goolishian said.

"When I went into the agency and told the staff she was not the chosen candidate, they could not believe it," she said.

Instead, after a series of contentious meetings, the board voted for Costa. His name had been added to the candidate's list at the last minute, after another male candidate withdrew his application, members said.

Goolishian quit on the spot; three others resigned immediately afterward.

"Someone said it was discrimination, but is it discrimination not to choose a caucasian to head the NAACP, or a Christian to head B'nai B'rith?" Marianne Milton, who resigned from the board after three and a half years, said yesterday. "I felt it just did not make sense to have a man at the head of Independence House."

Costa is the first man to head one of the 34 battered women's agencies in Massachusetts, according to Joyce Williams-Mitchell, executive director of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups.

Independence House "was one of the agencies built on the feminist model, on an empowerment model of women taking control of their lives," she said. "This is not within that model."

Kesten, the only Costa supporter to return calls yesterday, admitted as much. But she defended his credentials, and the board's decision.

"I've had calls from very strong feminists who told me we let an 'oppressor' into the agency," she said. "I have a different opinion on that."

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