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Gabby Petito Foundation to Headline at A Safe Place Event as Organization Faces Unprecedented Cuts

-- Family Turns Tragedy into Advocacy While A Safe Place, Lake County's Only Organization Exclusively Dedicated to Addressing Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking, Battles $2M in Lost Federal Funding --

LINCOLNSHIRE, IL — As A Safe Place faces devastating federal funding cuts affecting more than 15,000 people in Lake County, the organization is proud to announce a powerful act of solidarity: representatives from the Gabby Petito Foundation, including Gabby's mother and stepmother Nichole Schmidt and Tara Petito, will serve as keynote speakers at the 2025 *Unmask the Violence* event.

The Gabby Petito Foundation, created in memory of Gabby Petito, is partnering with A Safe Place to elevate awareness around domestic violence and amplify the voices of survivors in crisis. This collaboration comes as A Safe Place is forced to eliminate life-saving services due to a nearly $2 million loss in federal grants.

Gabby's story, which continues to spark national conversations around domestic violence, was also featured in a top-rated Netflix series—bringing even greater visibility to the urgent need for systemic change and support for survivors.

"Gabby's voice lives on through every person we reach and every life we help protect, and her story is one that should never have to be repeated," said Schmidt. Tara Petito added, "Everyone deserves a safe home and a life free from abuse. When communities, domestic violence agencies, law enforcement, and community leaders stand together, it creates a powerful ripple effect giving survivors the support and resources they need."

Due to the reduction of previously approved federal funding for A Safe Place:

- 33,109 nights of emergency shelter were provided last year—but more than 300 adults and children will go without shelter this year.
- The Bridges to Health program, which served nearly 5,000 survivors last year, has been eliminated.
- The Homicide Response Initiative, supporting an average of 60 families annually, is now defunded.
- 11 staff positions have already been lost.
- The Youth Services program, which serves nearly 10,000 at-risk youth, now faces reductions, risking a rise in gang activity, school instability, and crime.

“The cuts are brutal. They hit at the heart of what we do—keeping people alive and helping them rebuild,” said Pat Davenport, CEO of A Safe Place. “Having the Petito family with us this year brings national attention to a crisis we’re living locally.”

A Safe Place’s internal data shows that 95% of clients who stayed at the emergency shelter do not return to their abuser. Without funding, that safety net is torn.

“Help delayed is help denied. Every program we lose puts lives at risk,” Davenport added. *Unmask the Violence* is A Safe Place’s annual fall event held during Domestic Violence Awareness Month, providing a platform for education, advocacy, and fundraising to support free, critical services for survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking.

This year, the spotlight will fall not only on the stories of survivors—but on the crisis of losing life-saving programs right when they are most needed.

Learn more about ways to get help and provide support to those in need at this critical time: www.asafeplaceforhelp.org.

About A Safe Place:
A Safe Place is the leading provider of services to survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking in Lake County, Illinois. From emergency shelter and court advocacy to prevention education and long-term housing, A Safe Place delivers comprehensive, life-saving support to more than 24,000 Chicago-area residents annually at 16 locations—services now at risk without restored funding and donor support.

About the Gabby Petito Foundation:
Founded to honor the memory of Gabby Petito, the Foundation supports organizations that help locate missing persons, protect survivors, and raise awareness about the dangers of intimate partner violence. Learn more: www.gabbypetitofoundation.org.

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