



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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*SUPPORT H. B. 5819 AN ACT CONCERNING HARASSMENT OF CRIME VICTIMS,
COMPENSATION OF CRIME VICTIMS AND WAIVER OF COURT FEES FOR INDIGENT INMATES.*
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing, March 24, 2006

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Laura Cordes and I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy with the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide association of nine community-based rape crisis centers in Connecticut. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services.

During fiscal year 2004-2005 CONNSACS' community-based program staff and volunteers provided services to 4,742 sexual assault victims and their families. Our member centers also provided risk reduction and prevention education to more than 41,279 children and youth and to nearly 9,000 members of the general public and training for over 3,020 professionals, including law enforcement personnel.

We appreciate the work and the leadership that the members of the Judiciary Committee have provided to address crime victims' needs. CONNSACS supports all sections of *H. B. 5819 AN ACT CONCERNING HARASSMENT OF CRIME VICTIMS, COMPENSATION OF CRIME VICTIMS AND WAIVER OF COURT FEES FOR INDIGENT INMATES*, especially the new sections which would limit offenders' ability to use the civil actions to further harm or harass their victims, and allow the Office of Victim Services to award compensation in excess of the current maximum amounts.

We respectfully request that language be added to Subsection (a) of section 54-211 of current law, to allow victim compensation application eligibility for those sexual assault victims who have not reported the crime to the police within the required period of five days but have undergone a sexual assault exam and evidence collection within 72 hours of the assault.

According to statistics from the Connecticut Office of Victim Services, the number of sexual assault victims receiving victim compensation has declined over the past two years from 52 to 36. Sexual assault crisis advocates consistently give out information about the state crime victims' compensation fund, but far too many victims are not eligible to apply.

CONNSACS member programs service numbers, during FY 05 show that 650 sexual assault victims sought medical attention within 72 hours following the assault. During this same time period, the Division of Criminal Justice reimbursed health care facilities for nearly 1000 sexual assault exams and evidence collections. While our numbers show that the majority of the sexual assault victims we serve who undergo an exam and evidence collection report to the police, it may be after the five days following the crime, as is currently required per existing statute to be eligible for victim compensation.

We also know that sexual assault remains one of the most underreported crimes. Victims who may come forward for an exam and evidence collection may ultimately choose not to report to the police. Of the 650 victims who sought medical attention within the first 72 hours following the sexual assault, 87 did not report the crime to the police. Sexual abuse victims may not report the crime for many reasons including fear, shame, misplaced guilt, and psychological abuse. They often face enormous pressures to remain silent because of threats, fear, and family dynamics. Offenders, and sometimes even the victim's family, will threaten, coerce, or bribe to not press charges to protect the family and/or abuser. Crime victims nonetheless, they remain ineligible to apply for compensation.

Expanding the eligibility to apply for victim compensation to sexual assault victims who have undergone an exam and evidence collection within 72 hours of the assault, would help support crime victims who have medical and other expenses that they must incur as a direct result of sexual abuse.

The expansion of application eligibility would not adversely affect state compliance with federal Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funding guidelines which allow for states to use forensic exams in lieu of police reports for eligibility for victim compensation programs.

Thank you for your consideration.