

TO: Judiciary Committee  
FROM: Catherine Ewing-Rinker, LCSW, M.DIV  
RE: HB 5812

Good afternoon ladies and gentleman. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of HB 5812, An Act Concerning the Registration and Supervision of Sexual Offenders. My name is Catherine Ewing-Rinker and I am currently the staff person for the Ct. Children's Alliance. Today, however, I come before you today to present a much broader perspective. I have worked in the field of sexual assault and child abuse since 1978, in a variety of positions that have afforded me the opportunity to experience the reality of sexual and child abuse from many different perspectives. While I would ask you to support the proposed bill in total, I am here today specifically to address the provisions expanding the services provided by multidisciplinary teams and child advocacy centers.

As a Sexual Assault Counselor on a college campus in the late 70's, I sat with, and advocated for young women at one of the most difficult times in their lives. I saw how easily these young women could be revictimized by the very systems that were supposed to be serving them. At that time, there was little, if any, communication or cooperation between the various professionals working with sexual assault survivors. Retelling the story of her assault over and over again, to hospital staff, police and representatives of the legal system was a particularly cruel and painful process for these young women, making a life-shattering experience even more traumatic.

As a DCF worker and supervisor of a specialized Sexual Abuse Unit here in Hartford, I saw the devastating effect of sexual abuse on children and families, experienced the difficulty in obtaining a disclosure from a child victim, frightened, ashamed and intimidated by strange adults and the systems they represented. In the mid 80's there was no good place to interview a child victim...certainly not in the home where the abuse may have occurred, not in an intimidating DCF Office or Police Station, and not in a sterile and chaotic hospital Emergency Room. I've experienced the despair of having to close a case, or instruct one of my workers to close a case, due to lack of a clear statement while knowing in my gut that a child remained in danger, and commiserated with families in their frustration at the lack of support available, even if and when a disclosure was made.

As a School Social Worker, and trainer in the area of child abuse in my district, I witnessed the turmoil of school personnel required to make a report of suspected child abuse, the lack of clarity about their role was in interviewing the child, their discomfort in dealing with the families, and their frustration at never knowing what happened after they made their report.

As a clinician in private practice for over 13 years, I have worked with child and adult survivors of child sexual abuse. I see the short and long term effects of this particularly horrendous childhood trauma, and fully understand the importance of how the non-offending adult and adults charged with protecting that child respond immediately upon that child's disclosure. It can make all the difference in the world to that child, to their sense of self and their on-going sense of safety and psychological development.

As the staff person for five years for the Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children, I had the opportunity to work with professionals from a variety of disciplines, in the field of child sexual abuse. I know how important their work is, how dedicated these individuals are and how important it is for them to work together.

All along, through changes of discipline, administration, policy and practice, one thing has remained consistent. Clearly, the best way to serve children and their families in these most difficult and complex cases, is for all of the professionals charged with protecting these children to come together in a spirit of cooperation and communication. It is imperative that children be afforded a safe and child friendly environment in which to be interviewed by a caring professional who has the time to gain that child's trust, that non-offending family members be supported through the difficult and tumultuous time that an allegation of sexual abuse will bring on, and that all of the professionals involved know their respective roles and trust each other to do their part so that the child will not be further victimized and the perpetrator will be brought to justice.

Currently, these professionals meet together in 15 multidisciplinary teams and a few child advocacy centers around the state. For years they have been supported by Federal seed money, woefully inadequate and at risk of being revoked at any time, based on how the political winds prevail. If the Federal funding for these teams is cut, they will simply cease to exist and the children and families they serve will be left once again to a disjointed patchwork of services. There will be no avenue for professionals to come together to collaborate, to support each other, and to work together on behalf of the most vulnerable citizens of our State, child victims of sexual abuse.

Please do not let these critical teams and centers disappear through lack of funding. I urge you to cast your vote in support of HB 5812. Thank you.