

March 16, 2006

Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Diane Edell. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the State of Connecticut. I am writing in support of HB 5812. I am currently an independent forensic interviewer of children alleging child sexual abuse. Over the course of my career I have interviewed approximately 450 children. I have trained many of the forensic interviewers in our State and continue to serve as trainer and consultant in this area. In the past I was the Program Director of the Aetna Foundation Children's Center at St. Francis Hospital for 6 years. The Children's Center at St. Francis is a Child Advocacy Center. I serve on several subcommittees of the Governor's Task Force on Justice for Abused Children.

I strongly support the efforts of HB 5812 to strengthen the monitoring and supervision of offenders. During my career I have seen far too many children who have been abused by repeat offenders. I have seen the anguish of parents who couldn't understand why their child should be a victim of someone who should have been, if not in jail, heavily supervised so as to prevent repeat offenses. Stronger supervision will also mean a lot to the child victims who need to know that the outcome of their disclosure about the abuse actually resulted in serious consequences for the offender.

I also strongly support the efforts to categorize offenders by risk. On the one hand it provides more meaningful information to the community. On the other hand it distinguishes between types of offenders. As awful as child sexual abuse is, there are differences between offenses.

Most importantly I want to support funding for the 15 Multidisciplinary Teams and the 8 Children's Advocacy Centers. When I began this work in 1992, children who disclosed abuse might be interviewed by the hospital staff, by the police, by a DCF social worker. The child and family were re-traumatized and the information gathered was often unusable in court. Teams and Children's Advocacy Centers changed all that. Children are now interviewed by trained teams of interviewers or by specially trained forensic interviewers. They are interviewed once in a child friendly environment. They leave the interview feeling empowered and respected. Parents too experience the benefits of the Children's Advocacy Centers. They feel listened to, respected, and not judged. They get helpful information and experience relief at finally having professionals respond to their needs. We know from research that the child victims of sexual abuse who do the best in the future are those whose parents can be supportive and strong. We need to fund these Centers to maintain and expand these services. I recently read that 82% of women in jail were sexually abused as children. We can go a long way to alleviating this misery. In addition, by funding our Children's Advocacy Centers we have a cost effective way of addressing a serious problem.

I urge you to support this bill.