

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Janna Kenniston, Graduate Student at the UCONN School of Social Work and Rebecca deSimone, Graduate Student at the UCONN School of Social Work

Date: March 20, 2006

Re: Raised Bill No. 5821, AN ACT CONCERNING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES THAT ARE GENDER SPECIFIC AND TRAUMA-INFORMED

Good morning Honorable Senators, Representatives, and distinguished members of the House. My name is Janna Kenniston, I am a graduate student at the Uconn School of Social Work. This is my colleague Rebecca deSimone. We are both MSW interns at the CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence. We are here today in support of Bill No. 5821, AN ACT CONCERNING BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES THAT ARE GENDER SPECIFIC AND TRAUMA-INFORMED, as it relates to female victims of abuse.

With lack of available services, and the fear of carrying around the stigma of being an "addict", women are growing increasingly less likely to address substance abuse issues. Women that do seek services run a greater risk of relapsing because they return to the comforts of drugs and alcohol to medicate the pain of being physically or sexually abused. Thus, there is an urgent need to assess and address gender-specific treatment for substance abuse, trauma-related disorders, and co-occurring problems.

It is imperative that each behavioral health and substance abuse service in the state of Connecticut operates with fundamentals that are reflective of an understanding of the realities of women's lives. One source of relational disconnection aiding in the onset of addiction and relapse in women is interpersonal violence. If we are to deem ourselves "women-centered" service providers, then we must understand that women who have experienced physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse are drastically at risk for substance abuse. Therefore, treatment of substance-abusing women must take into account the probability that many female clients have suffered some form of abuse, and integrate trauma treatment with addiction treatment to provide the most successful outcomes for female clients.

If we are going to interrupt the cycle of addiction then we must insist that service-providers for women establish comprehensive gender-specific services that discontinue substance abuse, reduce self-harm, and address the traumatic effects of abuse.

On behalf of all female victims of domestic abuse that have or will have to behavioral health or substance abuse services in the state of Connecticut, I ask you to SUPPORT this bill.

Thank you for your time and concern.