



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.**

Nancy Kushins, Executive Director

***HB 5799: An Act Concerning Crime Victims and the Victim Advocate***

***HB 5812: An Act Concerning the Registration and Supervision  
of Sexual Offenders***

***SB 618: An Act Concerning the Statute of Limitations for the Criminal  
Prosecution of Offenses Involving the Sexual Assault of Minors***

***HB 5813: An Act Concerning Victims of Crime***

***HB5821: An Act Concerning Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Services  
That Are Gender Specific and Trauma-Informed***

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing, March 20, 2006

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Nancy Kushins and I am the Executive Director of 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.

CONNSACS opposes subsection six of section one and subsection c of section two of HB 5799.

As one of the victim services groups involved in the creation of the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA), CONNSACS remains proud of the establishment of this office as an independent state agency whose purpose is to protect and promote the rights of crime victims in Connecticut. CONNSACS serves as an active member of the Office of the Victim Advocate Advisory Council. At each meeting, we hear about the successful outcomes of interventions made by OVA at the request of victims when they feel they have no other recourse.

At this time, however, as I testified to last year, there remains no compelling need to give the Office of the Victim Advocate further authority to pursue appellate relief or to issue subpoenas. Should victims wish to allow the Victim Advocate to seek these courses of action, victims can do so with their informed consent. Victims have a right to confidentiality, and with a release from the victim, the Victim Advocate is currently able to acquire information without the use of a subpoena.

The statute under which this office derives its authority is working well as it exists. We look forward to ongoing collaboration between CONNSACS and OVA, as we continue to advocate on behalf of victims throughout the State.

In Section 5, subsection (a)(1) of HB 5799, we request that language be added to Sec. 54-211 of current law to allow victim compensation application eligibility for those sexual assault victims who have had not reported the crime to the police, but have undergone a sexual assault exam and evidence collection within 72 hours of the assault. According to statistics from the Office of Victim Services, the number of sexual assault victims receiving victim compensation has declined over the past two years from 52 to 36. This change 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.

The requirement, per existing statute, that a victim must report to the police in order to be eligible for victim compensation, eliminates those victims who may not wish to file a police report. At the same time, these sexual assault victims have medical and other expenses that they must incur. According to the Bureau of Justice statistics, only 26% of sexual assaults were reported to police during the period of 1992-2000. Expanding the eligibility to these crime victims will provide sexual assault victims with the necessary resources for their physical and emotional wellbeing.

CONNSACS strongly supports HB 5812, An Act Concerning the Registration and Supervision of Sexual Offenders. Policies, such as those outlined in this bill, formulated to manage sex offenders, must have as a primary goal the prevention of future sexual victimization. Such policies must hold sex offenders accountable while providing support and safety for victims and their families. We support models of sex offender supervision and treatment which are grounded in research, include collaborative approaches which are multi disciplinary and multi agency based, and are assessed critically and routinely to ensure their effectiveness. Section 1 (a) of this bill recommends the establishment of a Risk Assessment Board, and identifies its proposed members. We recommend that language be added that would specify that the victim advocate on the Risk Assessment Board have experience working with sexual assault victims and sex offenders.

States and communities across the nation are developing measures to manage adult sex offenders with the express purpose of increasing safety for victims and communities. Community education is critical in the effective management of sex

offenders, and should be a strong component of management policies. Measures should not replace or reduce comprehensive, evidence-driven strategies to reduce sex offense recidivism. Comprehensive strategies should include:

- \* Actuarial risk-assessments
- \* Polygraphs
- \* In-depth treatment provided by qualified practitioners, paid for in whole or in part by the offenders themselves
- \* Intensive supervision and monitoring by specially trained probation and parole officers
- \* Community prevention and education, including social messaging campaigns on respectful interaction
- \* Advocacy on behalf of victims

Based on the groundbreaking work that has been done through collaboration with Court Support Services Division (CSSD), the Center for the Treatment of Problem Sexual Behavior (CTPSB) and Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS), this program has been designated by the Center for Sex Offender Management (CSOM) as a National Resource Site. Since 1995, these three entities have worked together in the Intensive Sex Offender Probation Units located in New Haven, New London and Hartford to supervise and provide treatment for sex offenders, utilizing the nationally recognized containment model. Containment is an overall shared philosophy that targets community and victim safety whereby multiple stakeholders with similar goals, but different roles, help the adult offender with problem sexual behavior by setting healthy limits on the adult's behavior in the community. The containment model is well accepted and used in most states. Connecticut was the first state to incorporate the Victim Advocate as an active player in the containment model, and the CSSD, CTPSB and CONNSACS team have been asked over the years to consult with other states that have chosen to replicate this model. All three organizations have been nationally recognized for their work in this arena.

This bill includes funding to expand the successful work of the existing sex offender supervision/treatment/victim advocate teams to all probation units throughout the state (in addition to those in Hartford, New London and New Haven), as well as implementing the victim advocacy component of sex offender supervision and treatment in parole units. This includes ensuring a manageable caseload of 25 offenders with problem sexual behavior for each probation/parole officer, as recommended by the Issues Committee of the American Probation and Parole Association.

It also includes community education forums to be presented by a collaborative team that would include representatives from law enforcement, probation, parole, the Sex Offender Registry Unit of the Department of Public Safety, Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services and the Center for the Treatment of Problem Sexual Behavior. The intent of the curriculum would be to empower citizens by providing accurate and pertinent information about offenders with problem sexual behavior, including the explanation of registration and monitoring, as well as providing strategies for keeping individuals and families safe.

We also support sections 13 and 15, as proposed, which expands the definition of the criminal act of voyeurism to include the use of images for sexual gratification, and funding for both Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT's) and Child Advocacy Centers. During the last fiscal year, CONNSACS' member programs served over 1,200 child sexual abuse victims. MDT's and Child Advocacy Centers help to both identify and successfully prosecute child sexual abuse cases and coordinate services to victims and their families. The proposed increase in funding will help support full time coordinators to ensure the ongoing management and collaboration of key stakeholders to investigate child sexual abuse cases and meet the needs of victims and their families. With a multidisciplinary approach, communication can begin early among all parties, which often leads to enhanced prosecution and better outcomes for the victims.

CONNSACS supports SB 618 An Act Concerning the Statute of Limitations for the Criminal Prosecution of Offenses Involving the Sexual Assault of Minors. Psychological trauma from child sexual abuse can delay reporting, allowing the perpetrators to escape prosecution. Sexual abuse victims need more time to report their sexual abuse because of the extraordinary stress under which child sex abuse victims live their lives. Children and teens who have been sexually victimized do not come forward because of fear, shame, misplaced guilt, and psychological abuse. They often face enormous pressures to remain silent because of threats, fear, and family dynamics. Offenders, who more often than not know their victim, and sometimes even the victim's family, will threaten, coerce, or bribe a victim to keep quiet about the abuse to protect the family and abuser. The recent expansion of the statute of limitations has been a welcome sign of justice for many victims. SB 618 would further allow for victims whose abuse history falls outside of the current limitations an opportunity to seek criminal justice. We encourage lawmakers to continue to look for solutions to provide justice to Connecticut's children who were sexually abused prior to May 2002 and only have until their 20th birthday to report the crime, based on laws in effect at that time.

CONNSACS strongly supports section 2 of HB 5813 An Act Concerning Victims of Crime, which would limit offenders' ability to use the judicial process to further harm or harass their victims.

Lastly, CONNSACS supports HB5821 An Act Concerning Behavioral Health and Substance Abuse Services That Are Gender Specific and Trauma-Informed. Sexual assault survivors may experience short and long term health effects including behavioral health problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, depression, eating disorders and self-injury. Trauma informed, gender specific treatment acknowledges the unique needs of women and girls with abuse histories in both in-patient and outpatient settings. The Women, Co-occurring Disorders and Violence Study (WCDVS), is a five-year study conducted by SAMHSA of over 2,000 women with co-occurring mental and substance abuse disorders and trauma history. According to the study, women who received counseling that addressed all three aspects of their lives together (mental and substance abuse disorders and histories of violence [trauma]) improved more than women in usual care, which tends to be fragmented and uncoordinated. Women's

symptoms also improved when they participated in the planning, implementation and delivery of their own integrated services. We support this effort to ensure that all state funded behavioral health and substance abuse services be gender specific and trauma informed and that a competitive grant program be established to encourage best practices in the delivery of these services.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our positions on HB 5799, HB 5812, SB 618, HB 5813, and HB 5821 and for your consideration.