



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.
*In support of HB 6672: An Act Concerning Gender Specific and Trauma Informed
State Services***

**Laura Cordes, Director of Policy & Advocacy
Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing, March 5, 2007**

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Laura Cordes and I am the Director of Policy and 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 2005-2006, CONNSACS' community-based program staff and volunteers provided services to 4,326 sexual assault victims and their families. Our member centers also provided risk reduction and prevention education to more than 46,000 children and youth and to over 8,000 members of the general public and training for nearly 3,400 professionals, including law enforcement personnel.

Gender specific services address the issues that often create barriers to treatment for women and girls, and gender competent treatment specifically addresses the role that sexual violence and other traumatic experiences play in women's lives.

CONNSACS supports HB 6672 *An Act Requiring Gender Specific and Trauma Informed State Services*. We believe more programs are needed to meet the complex needs of women and girls in behavioral health care systems.

Unfortunately, there is an overwhelming shortage of behavioral health care providers that understand sexual assault dynamics and the complex role that sexual abuse plays in a survivor's treatment and recovery of behavioral health problems.

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In our 25 year history of working with sexual assault victims, CONNSACS is aware that mental health problems and histories of sexual or physical abuse frequently occur with substance abuse disorders. Although many survivors of sexual violence may never require mental health services, violence against women is closely associated with behavioral health issues including depression, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and eating disorders.

We support the proposed grant program that would encourage best practices and the delivery of gender specific treatment that addresses women's needs through the development of protocols to appropriately respond to clients who disclose a history of physical or sexual assault while in treatment. Subsequent State services and treatment for women faced with recurring mental health and substance abuse problems can help break the cycle of relapse and recovery, supporting women in their healing from their abuse and increasing sustained recovery from behavioral health problems.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our position and for your consideration. Should you have questions with regard to CONNSACS' position, please feel free to contact me.