

HB 6672: An Act Concerning Gender Specific and Trauma-Informed State Services
March 5, 2007

My name is Cinda Cash, Executive Director of The Connecticut Women's Consortium, a state-wide not-for-profit agency that focuses on policy, training and advocacy related to women with behavioral health needs. I want to address why this is an important issue and what it means to be Gender-Specific and Trauma-Informed.

Women's service needs are different from men's service needs because the way in which they ordinarily experience trauma is quite different. Women ordinarily experience trauma via someone close to them, often a member of the family or close relative; men's trauma experiences are usually via a stranger or someone outside the family. Many of the women in Connecticut's public sector service system have substantial trauma histories as a result of childhood and/or adult personal assault or violence of some sort. It is not uncommon for many of the women also to be engaged with one or more state agency due their life circumstances, i.e., DMHAS for their behavioral health needs, DOC and CSSD if they have had difficulty with the law, DCF if they have children are some examples. Therefore, it is wise to establish a singular understanding of gender-responsive and trauma-informed care across state agencies and within specific state agency structures but also to establish basic core principles when designing and delivering services.

Over the past twenty years, much knowledge concerning the unique needs of women has been gained in the fields of mental health, substance abuse and trauma treatment. We know through research that women's symptoms improve when they participate in the planning, implementation and delivery of their own service plans. We also know that this knowledge has yet to be applied in the majority of programs serving women.

The following **definition of gender responsive** is the foundation for creating and maintaining comprehensive, integrated service models for girls and women:

Being gender-responsive means creating an environment through site selection, staff selection, program development, content, and material that reflects an understanding of the realities of the lives of women and girls and that addresses and responds to their strengths and challenges.

Evidence drawn from a variety of disciplines and effective practice suggests that addressing the realities of women and girls' lives through gender-responsive policy and programs is fundamental to improved outcomes at all levels of service. The six guiding principles that follow are designed to address system concerns about the services and treatment of females in the social service system.

- **Gender:** Acknowledge that gender makes a difference.
- **Environment:** Create an environment based on safety, respect, and dignity.
- **Relationships:** Develop policies, practices and programs that are relational and promote healthy connections to family, children, peers, and the community.
- **Services:** Address the issues of substance abuse, mental health, and trauma through comprehensive, integrated, and culturally relevant services.
- **Socioeconomic Status:** Provide women and girls with opportunities to improve their socioeconomic status.
- **Community:** Establish a system of comprehensive and collaborative community services.⁸

Using these six guiding principles and strategies for implementing them,⁸ continue to –

- increase awareness among consumers, providers, administrators, funders and legislators of the need for gender responsive, trauma informed and culturally sensitive services within all delivery systems that serve girls and women;
- work collaboratively with state agencies in their efforts to design, implement and maintain gender responsive, trauma informed and culturally sensitive services to the girls and women who seek care and services
- recognize and support successful gender responsive programming and services.

What Is Presently Being Done

- DMHAS is engaging in a Women's Services Practice Improvement Collaborative (WSPIC) to enhance the delivery system of their residential women's and children's programs regarding gender and trauma informed care.
- CSSD has engaged in a similar initiative with their girls' programs and are about to do the same with their adult women's service system
- DOC has on-going training for women in their substance abuse Marilyn Baker Unit regarding gender and trauma.
- DPH has awarded a grant to The Connecticut Women's Consortium to work more closely with DOC in providing Intimate Partner Violence and Trauma Training to both staff and inmates at York Correctional Institution.

While work is presently being done in this area, it is essential that the initiative continue with strong leadership and with increased coordination among state agencies to ensure that some of our most vulnerable citizens have an opportunity at a better life.

Cinda Cash, Executive Director
 The Connecticut Women's Consortium
 205 Whitney Avenue
 New Haven, CT 06511
 203-498-4184x32
ccash@womensconsortium.org

Statements used in this testimony are excerpted from the bibliography that follows.

¹ The CT Roundtable on Women's Behavioral Health, a joint initiative of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) and the CT Women's Consortium (CWC), is a vehicle for sharing practical information that can inform and enhance access to services; advocating for available, affordable and appropriate gender specific policy and programs; and collaborating and coordinating the full range of behavioral health and related services needed by women. The Roundtable has been working on increasing, within state agencies' service delivery systems, the provision of gender responsive, trauma informed and culturally sensitive programs and policies.

² The Women, Co-occurring Disorders and Violence Study (WCDVS), a five-year study conducted by SAMHSA of over 2,000 women with co-occurring mental and substance abuse disorders and trauma history.

³ Bloom & Covington, October 5, 2004 "*Creating Gender-Responsive Services for Women and Girls in Connecticut*". Paper prepared for the CT Women's Consortium, New Haven, CT.

⁴ The Women, Co-occurring Disorders and Violence Study (WCDVS)

⁵ Bloom, eds., 2003. *Gendered Justice: Addressing Female Offenders*. North Carolina: Caroling Academic Press.

⁶ Gilligan, 1977. "In a Different Voice: Women's Conception of Self and Morality." *Harvard Educational Review*, 47. and Gilligan, 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

⁷ Benedict, 2003. *Capacity Building: Developing a Gender Responsive Justice System for Young Women in the State of Rhode Island/ A Focus Group Study*.

⁸ Bloom & Covington.