



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.**  
Bridget Reilly, Juvenile Sex Offender Teams Victim Advocate  
**HB 7039 *An Act Concerning Public Access to Proceedings in  
Certain Juvenile Matters***  
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee  
Public Hearing, February 16, 2007

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Bridget Reilly, and I serve as the Juvenile Sex Offender Teams Victim Advocate for 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.

We believe that the changes proposed in HB 7039, *An Act Concerning Public Access to Proceedings in Certain Juvenile Matters*, will have a negative impact on child and youth victims of sexual abuse.

While the bill proposes that judges will have the ultimate discretion to exclude a member of the public from the courtroom on a case by case basis, this does not address the presence of members of the public in the waiting areas of juvenile courts. Many of our juvenile courts serve small, rural towns where "everyone knows everybody". How do you think it would feel for a child victim or non-offending parent to sit down next to a neighbor, member of their church, or scout leader? The mere presence of these community members in the time preceding the hearing may not only compromise the confidentiality of the victim, but also further intimidate the victim and add to his or her fear and anxiety of others knowing what has happened.

As an advocate for sexual assault victims for nearly ten years, I also know of numerous cases in which the family or friends of the offender attempted to cause fear and to exert pressure on the victim to recant, both in and outside the courtroom. Even if the child (or non-offending parent) felt

comfortable in expressing her fear about the presence of certain people in the courthouse to her attorney and the judge excluded one or more of these individuals from attending, we should not place child sexual abuse victims in any situation where there is potential for further trauma.

Further, child sexual abuse is already an underreported crime, especially as a majority of child victims know the person who assaulted them. By opening up juvenile proceedings, we are creating yet another barrier for child victims to come forward. If these extremely personal matters are open to the public and the media we have the potential of not only creating public stigmatization for the offender, but also for the victim.

Lastly, the presence of the public and especially the media may serve as a deterrent for parents in abuse proceedings from admitting the abuse and asking for help in seeking treatment.

We understand that the proponents of this bill want to open juvenile proceedings in order to highlight the shortcomings in the system's response to child abuse and neglect. While we certainly applaud any reforms that would protect children from abuse, we believe that this bill endangers a child sexual abuse victim's right to privacy and has the potential to re-victimize the child and cause even more harm.

We encourage committee members to oppose this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.