



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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HB 7086 An Act Concerning Registration of Sexual Offenders

Submitted to the Committee on Judiciary

Public Hearing, February 23, 2007

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 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.

I am here today to testify on behalf of CONNSACS with respect to HB 7086 An Act Concerning Registration of Sexual Offenders. We commend those legislators who introduced this bill out of the desire to keep children and communities safe. CONNSACS shares that desire. However, components of HB 7086 may actually have the opposite effect.

CONNSACS believes that policies 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. In addition, such policies should be grounded in research, include collaborative approaches which are multi disciplinary and multi agency based, and be assessed critically and routinely to ensure their effectiveness.

In September 2006, thanks to Speaker Amann and Representative Lawlor, a Megan's Law Summit was held. They had the foresight to invite a representative from the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault, who spoke of the unintended consequences resulting

from the passage of Jessica's Law. CONNSACS and sexual assault coalitions in other states share the concerns expressed by Iowa.

Contrary to the popular myth of "stranger danger," children and youth are far more at risk of sexual abuse from adults they know. The same holds true for adult victims of sexual assault. Research shows that the vast majority of sex offenders know their victims, yet measures are generally designed to address situations in which the sex offender is presumed to be a stranger to the victim.

Treatment of sex offenders is more likely to be successful when offenders can be effectively supervised or monitored, and when there are community support systems. Connecticut has already taken such steps. In 1995, Connecticut was the first state to include victim advocates as part of the sex offender supervision team, which also included probation officers and sex offender treatment providers. Since that time, other states have replicated this model, and Connecticut was designated a resource site by the Center for Sex Offender Management. Presently, victim advocates are located in the New Haven, New London and Hartford Sex Offender Supervision Units. During last year's legislative session, additional funds were allocated to Court Support Services Division to allow them to hire more probation officers with lower caseloads to more effectively manage the sex offenders assigned to them. Funds were also allocated to incorporate the inclusion of victim advocates statewide, again placing Connecticut at the forefront of sex offender supervision. CONNSACS is in the process of hiring for these positions, whose primary responsibilities include ensuring that victims have a voice in the supervision team, and sharing the commitment to victim and community safety along with the probation officers and sex offender treatment providers.

HB 7086 addresses the areas of sex offender registration, GPS monitoring and mandatory minimum sentences for sex offenders. The position of CONNSACS on these issues follows:

Sex Offender Registration and Public Notification

Sex offender registration can be useful for law enforcement agencies in their identification and tracking of convicted sex offenders. However, over-inclusive public notification can actually be harmful to public safety by diluting the ability to identify the most dangerous offenders and by disrupting the stability of low-risk offenders in ways that may increase their risk of reoffense. Therefore, CONNSACS believes that internet disclosure and community notification should be limited to those offenders who pose the highest risk of reoffense.

In addition, it is CONNSACS' position that internet disclosure and community notification should be limited to those offenders whose public disclosure will not immediately or implicitly identify the victim. Without such limitations, victims who are related to the offender may be deterred from reporting their crimes.

Electronic Monitoring, such as G.P.S. (Global Positioning Satellite) Tracking

Electronic monitoring can be an effective tool in controlling offender behavior during probation or parole, as preliminary studies indicate that electronic monitoring can provide greater surveillance of offenders under supervision. It is not yet clear, however, to what extent such monitoring deters recidivism. Given the limited research results and the limited availability of public funds, CONNSACS believes electronic monitoring may be used most effectively in situations requiring intensive supervision and monitoring, such as for those offenders at highest risk of re-offense.

Mandatory Minimum Sentences

Long mandatory minimum sentences can have a number of negative consequences that serve to decrease, rather than increase, public safety. For example, lengthy mandatory minimum sentences sometimes result in prosecutors not filing charges or filing charges for a lesser crime than a sex offense, as well as increased plea bargains down to a lesser crime. Similarly, judges or juries may be less inclined to convict a defendant on a sex offense because of the mandatory minimum sentence. Long mandatory minimum sentences can also keep victims who were assaulted by someone they know from reporting the crime. All of these possible negative consequences can result in fewer sex offenders being prosecuted and/or tracked, thus CONNSACS opposes mandatory minimum sentences.

Victim and community measures to manage sex offenders ordinarily only address convicted sex offenders. However, research shows that the vast majority of sex offenders are never reported, let alone tried and convicted. We urge legislators to seriously consider the unintended consequences of HB 7086, and to avoid potential outcomes of fewer sexual assault victims coming forward and more sex offenders in our communities without effective supervision and treatment.

Thank you for your consideration.