



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

96 Pitkin Street
East Hartford, CT 06108
Phone/TTY: 860-282-9881
Fax: 860-291-9335
www.connsacs.org

Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

Nancy Kushins, Executive Director

Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

HB 7235 An Act Concerning Crime Victims and the Authority of the Victim Advocate

SB 1245 An Act Concerning A Tender Years Exception to the Hearsay Rule

Submitted to the Judiciary Committee

Public Hearing, February 28, 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.

HB 7235 proposes a number of measures that would enhance victim access to information. CONNSACS supports efforts to ensure that victims are advised of their rights, as well as efforts to ensure that those rights are protected.

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, there is no compelling need to give the Office of the Victim Advocate further authority to pursue appellate relief or to issue subpoenas. The statute

under which this office derives its authority is working well as it exists. CONNSACS is opposed to affording broadly defined additional authority to the Office of the Victim Advocate. 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.

Additionally, CONNSACS supports SB 1245 *An Act Concerning A Tender Years Exception to the Hearsay Rule*. We believe that the proposed changes will benefit child victims and the prosecution of child sex abuse cases.

Many children who are sexually abused never tell anyone. Those children who do disclose, often have to tell their stories (or parts of their stories) many times, thus forcing them to relive the trauma again and again. Allowing doctors, teachers, social workers and other persons to whom the child discloses to testify in court about the perpetrator and/or his possible motives, assists State's Attorneys in their efforts to prosecute sexual offenders WITHOUT placing the entire case on the child victim's testimony, or whether or not the child victim can testify.

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