



National Council of Jewish Women

Co-Chairs Harris and Villano, Vice Chairs Coleman and Abercrombie, Ranking Members Kissel and Gibbons, and Members of the Human Services Committee:

My name is Judy Singer and I am here to submit testimony regarding SB 1343, "An Act Concerning Compassionate Care for Victims of Sexual Assault" on behalf of the 900 members of National Council of Jewish Women of Connecticut.

Rape victims are victims of a violent crime. I represent the National Council of Jewish Women and I am here today to speak on their behalf. The state must be overwhelmingly concerned with the welfare of the victim. Rape victims deserve compassionate and immediate health care.

This legislature cannot predict the circumstances under which a rape victim arrives at a hospital emergency room. The legislature cannot predict what she will know about emergency contraception, her means for purchasing it, her ability to access it in a timely manner, the availability of transportation, the time of day or night, her physical condition, whether she will be admitted to the hospital, nor her mental state. We do not know what her religion may be.

All rape victims must be treated equally throughout the state and the standard of care must include: 1.) providing *medically accurate* information about emergency contraception and how taking it might prevent an unwanted pregnancy, 2.) offering the victim the option of obtaining the full dose of that medicine, 3.) providing the full dose of that medication if the rape victim requests it.

A rape victim should not have the additional worry that she may become pregnant from the assault she has suffered. She should not have to discover later that the doctors, nurses and other medical personnel at the emergency room she went to after the rape, willfully withheld information and did not tell her that there is a way she might prevent becoming pregnant from the rape.

Patients must be able to make treatment decisions based on *accurate* medical information and *their own* ethical or religious sensibilities. The religious or moral beliefs of a caregiver cannot be allowed to obstruct a patient's access to care. As long as all hospital emergency rooms treat all members of society and accept public money, they cannot impose their religious beliefs on victims of rape. Because all hospitals in our neighboring states of Massachusetts and New York, including Catholic Hospitals, are providing emergency contraceptives to rape victims without objection, we can see that a very narrow and medically unsound interpretation has created this problem at some of our hospitals.

A large percentage of Connecticut residents believe that rape victims should be offered emergency contraceptives in every emergency room throughout the state. It is unconscionable for a health care provider to be excused from providing what Connecticut residents consider to be the most basic care in these circumstances.

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Rape victims deserve compassionate care. Many hospitals around the state are falling short if rape crisis advocates are reporting that rape victims have not been informed of emergency contraceptives, offered them in the hospital, nor received a full dose. If the hospitals will not accept the responsibility of providing this standard of care on their own accord, then our state legislature must pass a law that compels them to do so.

NCJW is a volunteer organization, inspired by Jewish values, that works to improve the quality of life for women, children, and families and to ensure individual rights and freedoms for all through its network of 90,000 members, supporters, and volunteers nationwide.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Singer, NCJW
March 13, 2007