



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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In support of SB 398 An Act Establishing a Trafficking in Persons Council

In support of SB 1457 An Act Concerning Consensual Sexual Activity Between Adolescents Close in Age to Each Other

In support of SB 1458 An Act Concerning Jessica's Law

In opposition to HB 5503 An Act Concerning Residency Restrictions for Registered Sexual Offenders

In support of HB 7086 An Act Concerning the Risk Assessment Board, the Dissemination of Registration Information of Sexual Offenders and the Sexual Abuse of Children

Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing, April 4, 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 submitting testimony on behalf of CONNSACS with respect to the following:

- SB 398 An Act Establishing a Trafficking in Persons Council

- SB 1457 An Act Concerning Consensual Sexual Activity Between Adolescents Close in Age to Each Other
- SB 1458 An Act Concerning Jessica's Law
- HB 5503 An Act Concerning Residency Restrictions for Registered Sexual Offenders
- HB 7086 An Act Concerning the Risk Assessment Board, the Dissemination of Registration Information of Sexual Offenders and the Sexual Abuse of Children

CONNSACS supports SB 398 An Act Establishing a Trafficking in Persons Council. As an original member of the Interagency Task Force on Trafficking in Persons, CONNSACS remains committed to identifying and providing services to victims of trafficking. The establishment of a Trafficking in Persons Council will serve to ensure continuity to the excellent work that has already been done under the leadership and vision of Senator Stillman. Bringing together key state stakeholders has been a productive learning experience for us all. While a great deal of progress has been made, it is important that no momentum is lost. The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women has successfully played a key role in supporting and sustaining the activities of the trafficking task force, and will also provide outstanding leadership to the council.

CONNSACS supports SB 1457 An Act Concerning Consensual Sexual Activity Between Adolescents Close in Age to Each Other. This bill decriminalizes *consensual* sexual activity by teenagers close in age by increasing the age difference in the sexual assault in the second degree statute (CGS 53a-71) from two years to three calendar years when the younger party is 14 or 15 years old and by providing for a two calendar year age difference when the younger party is 13 years old.

Consensual sexual activity by and between adolescents should not be a violation of the criminal law. While as adults we may not agree with or condone sexual activity by young teens, studies show that they are making the decision to engage in sexual activity. The two-year age difference in Connecticut's law results in the prosecution of teens for their consensual relationships with their peers.

CONNSACS supports the modifications made to SB 1458 An Act Concerning Jessica's Law, and CONNSACS shares the desire of legislators to keep children and communities safe. Thank you for hearing the issues and concerns raised by victim services organizations and other entities. The bill, as now written, provides prosecutors with the tools they need, while considering the impacts on sexual assault victims.

CONNSACS opposes HB 5503 An Act Concerning Residency Restrictions for Registered Sexual Offenders. While CONNSACS applauds the positive intentions of legislators to keep our children safe, residency restrictions have unintended consequences of decreasing, rather than increasing, public safety.

A number of states have implemented residency restrictions in which sex offenders may not reside within a certain radius of schools, parks, skating rinks, certain neighborhoods, etc, and may not utilize resources such as group homes, homeless shelters and hurricane shelters. However, there is no evidence that these laws protect children. In

fact, those states that have studied the issue carefully have found no relationship between sex offense recidivism and sex offenders' proximity to schools or other places where children congregate (see for example, Minnesota Department of Corrections, Level Three Sex Offenders Residential Placement Issues, 2003 Report to the Legislature; Colorado Department of Public Safety, Report on Safety Issues Raised by Living Arrangements for and Location of Sex Offenders in the Community, 2004).

Iowa Department of Public Safety statistics show that the number of sex offenders who are unaccounted for has doubled since a residency restriction law went into effect in June 2005 (Iowa Sex Offender Registry, data as of February 15, 2006). Sex offenders who continually move or become homeless as a result of residency restrictions are more difficult to supervise and monitor, thereby increasing the risk of re-offense. In addition, the establishment of sex offender residency laws is creating a domino effect, in that once a law is established in a community or state, the neighboring communities and states are considering similar laws so as to keep sex offenders from moving to their jurisdictions.

Research has shown that sex offenders with domestic stability (stable housing and social support) are less likely to commit new sex offenses compared to those offenders who lack such stability (Managing Sex Offenders in the Community: A National Overview, Lane Council of Governments, Eugene, Oregon, 2003).

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.

Residency restrictions have prompted sex offenders to stop registering so that no one knows their whereabouts. Other states worry about hundreds of sex offenders who have been denied parole because they can't find legal places to live. Eventually, their sentences will expire, and when that happens, they'll be released without supervision.

In Connecticut during fiscal year 2005-2006, approximately 900 primary victims of sexual assault aged 17 and under were served by our nine community based rape crisis centers. Of these, only 6% were assaulted by strangers, meaning that 94% of these sexual assault victims knew their assailant. Residency restrictions are based on the assumption that sex crimes against children are most often committed by predatory

strangers. One thousand feet residency restrictions don't help the victim whose offender lives 3 feet from her bedroom door. One thousand feet residency restrictions won't help the victim whose offender waits at her locker, 20 feet outside her classroom door. And one thousand feet residency restrictions won't help an athlete whose coach is fondling and abusing her in the locker room.

CONNSACS supports HB 7408 An Act Concerning the Risk Assessment Board, the Dissemination of Registration Information of Sexual Offenders and the Sexual Abuse of Children. As a member of the risk assessment board, CONNSACS supports the extension of the report deadline to October 1, 2007, as well as the process by which victims would have the ability to remove the restriction on the dissemination of sex offender registration information.

This bill will extend the civil and criminal statute of limitations for offenses involving the sexual abuse of minors until the victim is 40 years beyond the age of majority, or age 58. Sexual abuse victims need more time to report their sexual abuse because of the extraordinary stress under which child sex abuse victims live their lives. Children and teens who have been sexually victimized do not come forward because of fear, shame, misplaced guilt, and psychological abuse. They often face enormous pressures to remain silent because of threats, fear, and family dynamics. Offenders, who more often than not know their victim, and sometimes even the victim's family, will threaten, coerce, or bribe a victim to keep quiet about the abuse to protect the family and abuser. This ten year expansion of the statute of limitations recognizes the trauma of child sex abuse and affords victims sufficient time to come to terms with the abuse and then to seek the intervention of the criminal justice system.

Thank you for your consideration.