

**Ms. Clara Smith
Manchester, CT 06040**

Human Services Committee
Room 2700, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06104

**Raised House Bill 5622
Personal Testimony; February 28, 2008**

I'm a violinist, former head of the Music Department for the Town of Manchester. I started the string program and taught for 32 years. My last 15 years were spent directly in back of the Police Department at Illing Middle School. Did I know that the police and their Interval House Resource Office would help save my sanity and my life?

I had been married to John for nearly ten years. We had what I thought to be a fine marriage. We had lots of activity with our church, where he and I met, and a good relationship with our adult children.

It wasn't until 2004 when I was diagnosed with Chronic Myeloid Leukemia that things started to change. He became agitated and distant. A few weeks later, on February 12, 2005, I awoke on a Saturday morning with him becoming physically abusive and verbally threatening to me. I fled to the living room where he pinned me down by sitting on my chest and strangling me. He said, "I could kill you if I wanted to." Through divine intervention or luck, he got up and left.

I ran into the street, screaming for someone to call the police. I've never had anyone admit to making the call, but the wonderful Manchester Police Department arrived soon after.

Officer David Patria took my statement, which was difficult to do because I was so stunned and, keep in mind, extremely ill with the Leukemia. I had barely begun treatment and had no strength, mentally or physically. I was numb. Photos of my neck were taken by another officer.

After John's arrest, we were ordered to go to the Manchester Superior Court. We were told by the Family Counselor that I did not need an attorney and that we should cohabitate and attend counseling sessions. Looking back, I ask, would a rape victim be asked to live with a rapist?

Because I had no fight in me, I did as I was told. I received a call from the Interval House representative at the Police Department and ignored what she had to say. I believed that the court system had my best interest in mind and that was keeping a senior citizen with a potentially fatal illness safe. However, my feeling now is that the courts protect the abuser rather than the victim.

Our counseling sessions failed because of John's angry outbursts. After asking, I was lucky enough to have an Interval House representative go with me to Rockville Court to request a Civil Restraining Order. John was becoming more and more agitated and verbally abusive. I was terrified. The request was denied. I couldn't believe it. In fact the Court Mediator said that she thought my illness had provoked the attack.

The safe spot in my life was the office at the Police Department. I could call when I needed an ear to listen and help to get John to stop harassing me on the phone, leaving me notes in my mail

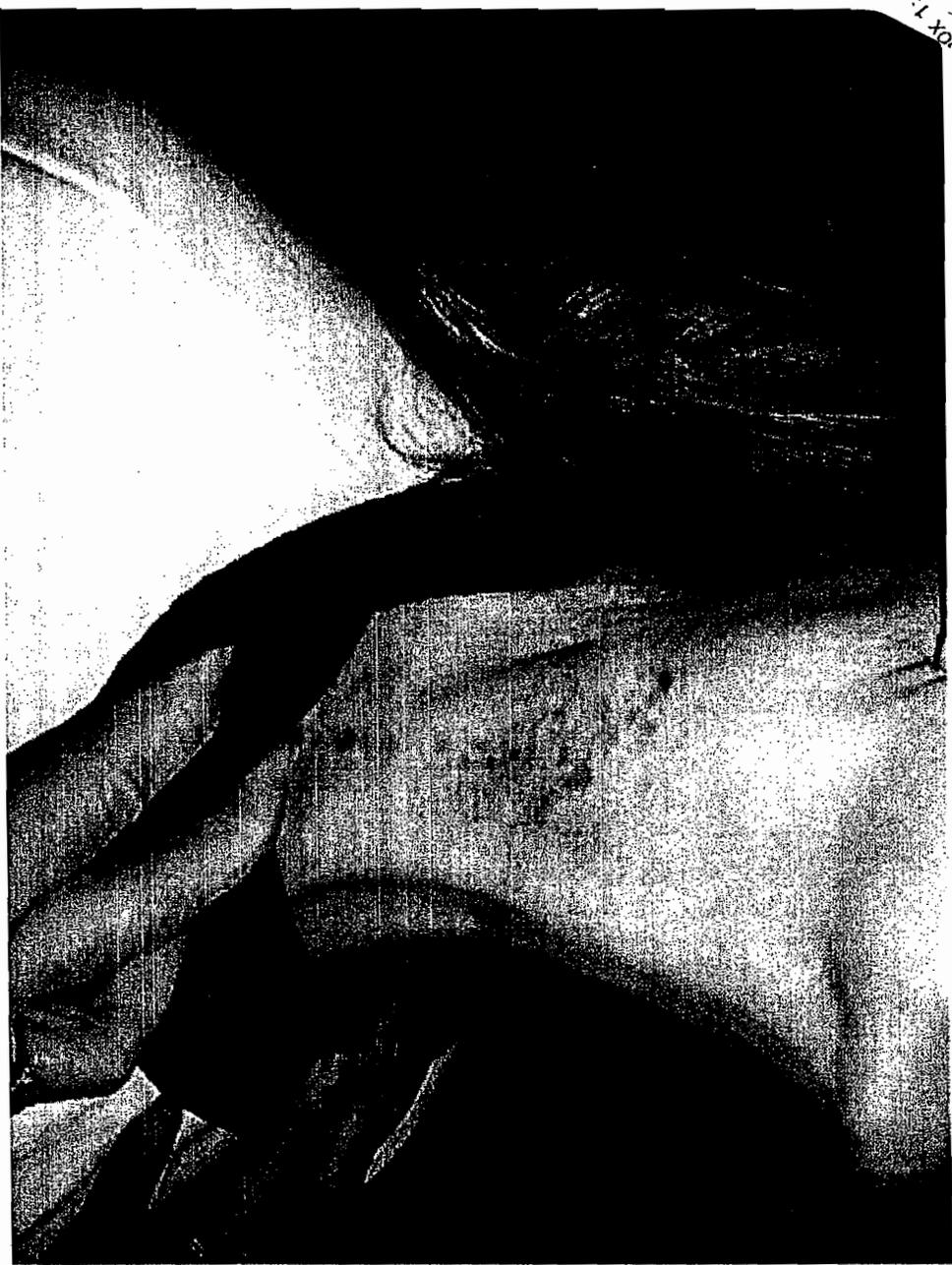
box and stalking me in the neighborhood. Even my attorney appeared to be unable to terminate his endless threats. To feel safe I had to hire someone to stay with me for six weeks.

Interval House helped me navigate the maze of the Judicial System. They gave me support when even my closest friends were immobilized. They helped me in both the Civil Court and the Criminal Court sessions. Through Interval House, my church provided me with the necessary protection of an armed Marshall when John was forced to remove his belongings.

I had the privilege of sitting on a panel of Interval House members and addressed the Hartford Police Academy. Much to my shock, a former student was sitting next to me. I heard her story and asked why she had not said anything to me about the abuse. Her answer was that she didn't want to be taken from her mother and sisters. I've had numerous students who have admitted to being abused at home.

Domestic abuse has no age boundaries. I don't have time now to list the growing numbers of children in at risk homes, but it is significant. Our town, along with many others needs Interval House and other resources more than ever. Funding should be increased and information needs to be available to everyone 24 hours a day.

I am 68 years old with six years of college and couldn't get the help I needed from the Courts or my attorney to ensure my safety. What do uneducated families do? What can children do? Please realize that Interval House saves peoples lives and sanity. Luckily, I've also been in full remission from the leukemia for 2 and a half years. I can live and love again thanks to Interval House and the Manchester Police Department.



Box 1: