



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

SUPPORT: SB 35 AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGISTRATION OF SEXUAL OFFENDERS

HB 5033 AN ACT PROHIBITING SEXUAL OFFENDER NAME CHANGES

HB 5924 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A SENTENCING COMMISSION

SB 699 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SEXUAL ASSAULT OF CHILDREN

Nancy Kushins, Executive Director
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing, March 20, 2008

Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Nancy Kushins and I am the Executive Director of 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 2006-2007 CONNSACS' community-based program staff and volunteers provided services to 4,245 sexual assault victims and their families. Our member centers also provided risk reduction and prevention education to nearly 34,000 children and youth and to over 5,000 members of the general public and training for close to 2,500 professionals, including law enforcement personnel.

On behalf of CONNSACS and our nine member programs, I would like to submit testimony in favor of SB 35, SB 699, HB 5033 and HB 5924.

With respect to HB 5924, CONNSACS has served on the Sentencing Task Force for the past year, including active participation on the Community Supervision/Alternative Sanctions Subcommittee and the Sentencing Structure Subcommittee. This multidisciplinary group has grappled with various criminal justice and sentencing issues including, but not limited to, determining offender risk, rehabilitation of offenders, public safety, racial disparities, diversionary programs, and probation terms. CONNSACS supports this bill to establish a permanent sentencing commission to formalize the work of the task force and allow for an annual review and ongoing analysis of the complex issues and recommendations related to sentencing.

CONNSACS supports SB 35, An Act Concerning the Registration of Sexual Offenders with the Governor's proposed language that removes from Section 7 the requirement that the motor vehicle operator's license of sex offenders include reference to the statute under which such person is required to register.

We strongly believe 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. SB 35 contributes to those efforts.

The Governor and the legislature are to be commended for the effective incorporation of victim centered language in this bill. For example, Section 2, subsection (d) refers to a person filing an application with the court to be exempted from the registration requirement. This section includes a provision allowing for victim notification of such application as well as considering the victim's input.

Sex offender registration can be useful for law enforcement agencies in their identification and tracking of convicted sex offenders. It is the opinion of CONNSACS that internet disclosure 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. We are pleased that in SB 35, Section 9 effectively addresses this by restricting the dissemination of registration information when the identity of the victim could be revealed. It also provides for the restriction of information when there are degrees of kindred involved. This is particularly important since last year in Connecticut, of the victims seen by our nine rape crisis centers, 80% of those victims knew their perpetrator, a rate that is even higher for victims aged 17 and under.

CONNSACS, along with the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence and the Center for Sex Offender Management, supports sex offender management strategies that are collaborative in their approaches and multi-disciplinary and multi-agency based. Again, in SB 35, Sections 14 and 15 effectively demonstrate a commitment to this approach as well.

CONNSACS has served on the Risk Assessment Board since its inception, and we would like to continue our active involvement as a member of the newly established Sex Offender Registry Policy Advisory Committee. The formation of these two committees as forums to utilize the expertise of subject matter experts is strongly supported by CONNSACS.

In Connecticut, we are fortunate that the Governor and lawmakers seek, and listen to, the input of diverse entities to ensure that we have laws that actually work as originally intended. This has not always been the case in other states where they have enacted legislation in response to high profile cases, without considering the views of key stakeholders or potential unintended consequences, especially for victims.

In fact, Connecticut serves as a national model for collaborative approaches to sex offender management. For the past ten years, CONNSACS' Victim Advocates have been part of the Probation Sex Offender Supervision Units in three locations in the state. Last year, that model, which includes Probation, Sex Offender Treatment and Victim Advocacy, was expanded to every Probation Unit in the state. While this program has been replicated in other states, we are the only state in the country to have Victim Advocates involved in sex offender management on a statewide basis. In addition, for the first time, last year a Victim Advocate became part of the Parole Special Management Unit, which supervises sex offenders. We should be very proud of our state's cutting edge philosophies and our ability to effectively implement successful strategies in the management and supervision of sex offenders. Statewide leadership, including the Governor, lawmakers, Probation and Parole, along with sex offender treatment providers, has made these achievements possible. SB 35 builds on past collaboration and enhances our capacity to keep communities safe, while holding sex offenders accountable. We urge your support of this bill.

CONNSACS is also in support of HB 5033, a prudent measure that would prohibit sex offenders from changing their name. CONNSACS' Victim Advocates work with hundreds of survivors to maintain knowledge of where sex offenders work and live in order to avoid contact with the offender. Persons convicted of sex offenses who are allowed to change their name, would undoubtedly have a greater ability to go undetected and unmonitored and would create great distress for victims and their families.

Lastly, we support SB 699 which would prioritize sexual assault cases and allow witnesses that would otherwise be sequestered during a trial to stay with the victim to support them during testimony in child abuse cases. Sexual assault trials are particularly difficult for children and while an advocate and prosecutor can provide support, a close family member or adult can help diminish the trauma of

testifying and help bridge the unfamiliar with familiar. Sexual assault victims face a long and difficult healing process made more challenging by lengthy investigations and trials. Extending the prioritization of cases in statute to include crimes involving assault, sexual assault or abuse of a child will help to shorten the time from investigation to sentencing and may improve the number of victims who are able to stay involved in a case. This, in turn could contribute to better outcomes for prosecution of sex offenders. Shortening the time from complaint to the end of an investigation and/or prosecution will undoubtedly mean that more sexual assault victims will be able to feel that they can move forward with their lives and begin healing from the assault.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you would like additional information about our position or services.

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