BIRMINGHAM GROUP
Health Services, Inc.

To: Judiciary Committee

From: Susan DeLeon, Director
The Umbrella

Date: March 10, 2008

Re: HB 5836: An Act Concerning Staffing at Domestic Violence Shelters

Imagine leaving your warm home and belongings in the middle of the night and walking into a strange environment in an unfamiliar place. You are now faced with the hurdle of dealing with your children, crying to go home as well as your own ambiguous feelings and racing thoughts. Panic sets in. An advocate is trying to talk to you. You haven't heard one word. You look around your new home, now a shelter, and suddenly feel more alone than ever. You want to run out the door, but at that point reality sets in – there is no home for you anymore. Just the realism, the truth, that you are a battered women running for your life. After getting settled at the shelter, your advocate explains that her shift is over at 8:00 o'clock. You can tell that she is feeling bad that she must leave you so soon. It is Friday evening and there will not be anyone to talk to tonight. Maybe one of the other women in the house will listen. Perhaps you are having difficulty trusting people because you trusted someone you loved and they hurt you. What do you do, how will you deal with your feelings and what can you expect at this new place?

I am writing to support Connecticut's domestic violence request for 24/7 funding. I have been a Program Director for 17 years. I can honestly tell you that it has been a struggle for women and children living at our shelter to feel totally supported without having a staff person available to them during the hours in the evening and on weekends when

they feel most vulnerable. The scenario above is real for over 1,000 women and almost 1,000 children who were sheltered in domestic violence projects this year. Residents of our shelter program have stated that they are fearful and afraid during the late hours when the sun goes down when all is quiet. Many women are suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder because their abusers have done terrible things to them and they know that when they close their eyes, the racing thoughts and nightmares will begin again. They remember their abuser's words. This is not over yet. You will be sorry you left.

Our shelters are a fantastic resource for women and children and well utilized. We have come so far in that we now can offer safety for those fleeing from an abusive partner. But, it is not enough. We need to do better. Women and children need to know that the community cares about what has been happening to them and that real support is there for them in their time of crisis. We need to work together to break the cycle of violence. Our programs can be successful in helping families to live a healthy and productive existence. Women and children shouldn't have to feel unsupported. If only we would be able to offer families an all embracing program. Please help us to advocate for the thousands of adults and children affected by domestic violence by helping us to obtain the necessary funding so that we can establish the foundation that will work improve the lives of women and children.

Thank you.