



To: Judiciary Committee

From: Lisa Holden
Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Date: March 10, 2008

Re: House Bill 5836: An Act Concerning Staffing at Domestic Violence Shelters

Senate Bill 642: An Act Concerning the Availability of Victim Advocates in Courthouses

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Member Shelter Programs

The Umbrella
Ansonia, CT

The Center for Women & Families
Bridgeport, CT

Women's Center
Danbury, CT

United Services, Inc.
Domestic Violence Programs
Dayville, CT

Network Against Domestic Abuse
Enfield, CT

Greenwich YWCA
Domestic Abuse Service
Greenwich, CT

Interval House
Hartford, CT

Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis
Meriden, CT

New Horizons
Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center
New Britain, CT

Domestic Violence Services
New Haven, CT

Women's Center of SE CT
New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services
Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project
Torrington, CT

Safe Haven
Waterbury, CT

United Services, Inc.
Domestic Violence Programs
Willimantic, CT

Good morning, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Lisa Holden and I am the Executive Director for the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Thank you for accepting my testimony regarding House Bill 5836: An Act Concerning Staffing at Domestic Violence Shelters. We have also attached written testimony for Senate Bill 642.

For the past six years, CCADV and its members programs have been working to increase access to emergency shelter and support services for victims of domestic violence. This has been a particularly challenging experience. Supporting me today in the audience, are the many advocates who have worked tirelessly to provide for domestic violence victims. As you have heard, we have many compelling stories. But in the essence of time we have asked our member programs to submit written testimony. I understand your

schedules are hectic, so I politely ask you to please take time to read what they and victims have written.

I don't think there is anyone here today who cannot empathize or does not understand the need for domestic violence services. Yet, in an environment of limited funds for social programs, it seems important to demonstrate that our programs are *effective and efficient* – that these programs are improving people's lives in specific, measurable, and cost-effective ways.

When a victim of domestic violence and her children come to a shelter, *the cycle of violence is interrupted*. And when that cycle is interrupted, police are not going to the home, emergency medical care is not required, and employers do not lose productivity because victims are unable to work.

We can keep victims in the workforce because they will have a safe and supportive environment to return to at the end of each day. We can keep their children in school. We can reduce the likelihood of intergenerational violence because children will not be exposed to continued violence; instead they will be nurtured and taught at a young age that violence is not an acceptable way to solve problems.

That's what the Connecticut Coalition and its eighteen member programs is offering. The chance to get quality services while saving money in the long run.

Three years ago, CCADV received \$500,000 additional funding towards implementing a

plan to insure 24 hour on site round the clock staffing at our domestic violence shelters and we are once again seeking your assistance. I would like to share with you what we have been able to accomplish so that you know your state dollars are being well spent. With the \$500,000 we were able to provide an additional 300 hours of service per week for victims of domestic violence. This has translated into additional counseling and advocacy services, time to facilitate groups and work specifically with the children. I am please to let you know that when 785 persons who sought our services were surveyed:

- 88% percent reported that they now know more about domestic violence and its effect on their lives;
- 89% percent now know more about the resources, services and options available to them;
- 87% percent now know increased ways to keep themselves safer; and
- 92% percent of those surveyed feel they have benefited from the services they have received.

I believe we have demonstrated the additional \$500,000 that we received has been put to good use. As suggested, we have applied for United Way monies, we have volunteers and interns to assist us and we have secured all the federal dollars that are available to us. Through our fundraising efforts, we have been able to significantly reduce our request to you by \$1.5 million dollars but we find that we have exhausted all other potential sources of funding.

Last year alone, 53,000 victims of domestic violence received some type of assistance

from their local program. We know that there are other victims who need our help, yet due to limited resources, we are unable to assist them.

Our request for additional funding may seem burdensome yet I can assure you that the cost to the state for other types of services that are offered as a solution to domestic violence are far more costly. Please consider helping victims to access support services 24 hours each and every day by allocating an additional \$ 2.25 million dollars in the DSS budget to support the work of each domestic violence program in Connecticut.

I thank you in advance for any positive consideration of my request.

Senate Bill 642: An Act Concerning the Availability of Victim Advocates in Courthouses

There have been several proposed bills introduced this session to support the need for victim advocates in all court houses throughout Connecticut. The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence is supportive of this legislation and has two areas of need your consideration.

- 1) Three Domestic Violence Docket Advocates in three new docket court locations.

In February 2006 there was a decision to expand Connecticut's domestic violence docket courts to new locations in the Norwalk, New Britain, and New London judicial districts. This decision was the result of a joint initiative supported by the state Judicial Branch, the Chief State's Attorney's Office, and the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence. While the decision to expand the dockets was the right one, there was one glaring problem: no funding to support the necessary advocates. \$150,000 will support three full time Family Violence Victim Advocates in three new domestic violence docket courts located in Norwalk, New Britain and New London. The \$50,000 requested for each full time advocate will cover their salary, fringe, supervision and all operating expenses.

The specialized docket courts have the goal of increasing victim safety and offender accountability through "vertical case management," which seeks to enhance effectiveness through a coordination of resources and a team approach to each case. That team includes law enforcement, prosecutors, family relations counselors, probation officers and family

violence victim advocates. Team members monitor a case from start to finish and hold weekly meetings to share information about the case. In addition, a judge monitors the case through court appearances and conferences in chambers.

The role of the victim is recognized as significant in the Domestic Violence docket model; therefore contact with the victim(s) is a constant part of the process, largely through the efforts of the advocate's office. Victims frequently require ongoing services, and information shared by them may be used for assessment purposes.

We applaud the Judicial Branch for expanding the Domestic Violence Docket Courts. We now ask this committee to support funding that will allow the three new docket courts to have the necessary victim advocacy services. Domestic Violence Docket Courts cannot be successful without the presence of the advocates who represent the victim's voice to the team.

2) To develop a plan for implementing Family Violence Victim Advocates in civil courts throughout Connecticut.

CCADV is seeking \$150,000 per year for two years to develop a plan to provide comprehensive services to victims of family violence in civil courts. Many victims of domestic violence never call the police yet they are in need of an effective intervention to stop the violence they are experiencing. Instead, they turn to the family court for restraining orders, divorce and to resolve custody issues.

With domestic violence victim advocates in family court, every victim could be assigned an advocate who could explain how the court works in a culturally sensitive manner. Advocates will also keep victims updated on the progress of their case, limiting the time other court personnel would spend answering their questions and concerns. The advocate can sit with a victim in court on a restraining order hearing and accompany a victim to custody and divorce meetings with the Family Division.

CCADV, through its member programs, has a proven track record and the relationships necessary to implement victim advocacy services in family court. We believe that we can present a plan to assist victims in civil court that will be as effective as the family violence victim advocate program currently in criminal and specialized docket courts.

Thank you for any consideration of our requests.