



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE
505 HUDSON STREET, HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106

**Testimony of Michelle Cruz, State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Insurance and Real Estate Committee
Thursday, February 19, 2009**

Good afternoon Senator Crisco, Representative Fontana and distinguished members of the Insurance and Real Estate Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT** of:

House Bill No. 6354, An Act Regulating Surety Bail Bond Agents

In 1996, Connecticut residents overwhelmingly supported passage of the Victims' Rights Amendment to our state constitution. Among the constitutional rights of crime victims is the right to be treated fairly and with respect; the right to be reasonably protected from the accused; and the right to participate throughout the criminal justice process. The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) was created to protect and promote the constitutional rights of crime victims; to evaluate the delivery of services to crime victims; and to recommend changes in policy or legislation to advance the rights of crime victims in Connecticut.

While determining the amount of bond to place on an accused person to assure their appearance in court, a bail commissioner and/or a judicial authority will consider the nature and circumstances of the alleged offense, among other factors. Typically, the more severe the offense is, the higher the bond will be.

House Bill No. 6354 will improve the accountability and oversight of bail bond agents providing services to the accused persons seeking release on bond. Unfortunately, a lack of attention and supervision over the bail/bond system has created a habit of competing business practices. Accused persons are striking side deals (without paying the statutory required percentage) with bail bond agents to gain release and this is negating the factors considered for release by the bail commissioner and/or the judicial authority, as well as compromising the safety of crime victims.

I strongly urge the committee to support House Bill No. 6354 and put an end to the long history of bad business practices by bail bond agents. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michelle Cruz".

Michelle Cruz, Esq.
State Victim Advocate