



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

96 Pitkin Street
East Hartford, CT 06108
Phone/TTY: 860-282-9881
Fax: 860-291-9335
www.connsacs.org

Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.
HB 6452 An Act Concerning Discrimination
Elizabeth Cafarella, Director of Public Policy and Communication
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing, March 19, 2009

Good morning Senator MacDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Committee, my name is Elizabeth Cafarella, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Communication at Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (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.

CONNSACS submits this testimony in support of **HB 6542, An Act Concerning Discrimination**. CONNSACS has a long history of anti-oppression work. We feel strongly that discrimination in any form is unacceptable, and we support this legislation, which would add the phrase "gender identity or expression" to Connecticut's existing non-discrimination laws.

Violence against women in our society is a very real issue, and this bill is intended to curb the violence regularly experienced by those whose gender identity or gender expression does not conform to some people's expectations.

Unfortunately, homophobia in our culture puts LGBT people at greater risk for sexual assault. It is common for perpetrators to use sexual violence as a way to punish and humiliate someone for being transgendered, and/or for sexual assault to be one type of violence that occurs during an anti-gay or anti-transgender battering. A common example of this is when individuals who think they can "change" a person's sexual orientation specifically target lesbians, bisexual women, and transgendered individuals for sexual assault.

In a sample of 412 university students, 16.9% of the subjects reported that they were lesbian, gay, or bisexual; the remainder identified themselves as heterosexual. Of the lesbian, gay, and bi-sexual subjects 42.4% (30.6% female and 11.8% male) and 21.4% of the heterosexuals (17.8% female and 3.6% male) indicated they had been forced to have

sex against their will. (This information was compiled in 2003 by the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA)).

As part of our mission to end sexual violence, it is important to raise awareness about the heightened threat of violence facing those who are, or are perceived as, transgender, and to ensure that the laws of our state protect all citizens from discrimination and victimization.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to provide additional information or answer questions you may have about our position or services. You may contact me at ecafarella@connsacs.org or at 860-282-9881.