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Testimony in Favor of Funding for 24-Hour Staffing at Domestic Violence Shelters

Good afternoon. My name is Cathy Zeiner, and I am here to ask you, as you deliberate over these next several months, that **you ensure adequate DSS funding for domestic violence shelters**. I am the Executive Director of the Women's Center of Southeastern Connecticut, Inc. We provide domestic violence services to more than 6,000 victims per year in New London County. And **until last October 1st, we were one of the last three (3) domestic violence shelters in the state with 24-hour paid staff.**

Before last October 1st, we were there when a woman came to us, severely beaten, with a broken arm and stitches in her leg and across her face; and she was so heavily medicated for the pain that she threw up all night. We were there to comfort her, to give her support, and to ensure that **if she needed emergency medical assistance, someone would be there to make the call.**

Before last October 1st, we were there when the 11-year old boy came downstairs at 5:00 in the morning with night terrors, and our advocate could reassure him; could tell him that he didn't have to stand between the gun and his Mom to protect her, and could **tell him he was finally safe.**

And before last October 1st, we were there when a Department of Developmental Disabilities caseworker called our hotline to look for shelter for one of his clients that needed full-time staffing support. If we weren't there, and the other two shelters were full, **she would have had to return to her abuser, because no one would have been there to support her.**

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Domestic Violence



Member Agency
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Connecticut

But since October 1st, we haven't been there

- after 10:00 at night,
- or on weekends,
- or on holidays.

After 30 years, and despite our best efforts in fundraising from grants, foundations, corporations, individuals, and the United Way, we just couldn't patch enough funding together to continue to sustain 24-hour staffing anymore. **The costs were too high to our other programs.**

- We had to reduce our hours in our Norwich office.
- We had to reduce the number of counseling sessions and length of those sessions for victims.
- We had to refer people to our hotlines and support groups, even when that was not the most appropriate form of service for them.
- We even got to the point where we had so little staff that we were interrupting individual counseling sessions to answer the hotlines during the day.

The saddest part of all is that now, even after discontinuing 24-hour staffing and because other funding sources are declining so much, we are likely to return to those insufficient service conditions again.

As you know, **Connecticut is one of only 5 states in the country that does not support 24-hour staffing of its domestic violence shelters. Only about ½ of our budget came from DSS.** The rest we had to cobble together ourselves. **That is not only an embarrassment, but it can be dangerous – to victims and to the community at large.**

As you consider reallocating funds for social services, please be sure to consider how critically important it is to adequately fund domestic violence shelter services.

Thank you.