



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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

Michelle S. Cruz, Esq.  
State Victim Advocate

## Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate Education Committee Monday, March 1, 2010

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and distinguished members of the Education 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:

### **Raised House Bill No. 5315**, *An Act Concerning Education and the Reduction of Domestic Violence*

One of the many responsibilities of the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) is to conduct programs of public education and outreach to the community. In December of 2007, the OVA sent letters to all colleges, universities and high schools around the state to offer the OVA as a resource to their institution. The response was overwhelming; the OVA visited numerous classes, varying from criminal justice to health awareness. The OVA discussed issues relating to victims' rights, teen violence, sexual assault and safety.

Statistics show that one in three teenagers has experienced violence in a dating relationship. Teen dating violence is often hidden because teenagers typically are inexperienced with dating relationships, want independence from their parents, are pressured by peers and have misguided views of love and relationships. Just as we educate our children about health and exercise, it is important to teach them about healthy relationships and personal safety, as well as what the red flags are in potentially dangerous relationships. In addition, we must also teach our children to stand up for one another and voice their concerns over either controlling partners or abusive behavior of their peers. Bystander responsibilities go hand in hand with education about teen dating violence.

Moms and Dads for Education to Stop Teen Dating Abuse (MADE) is a national coalition of parents, teachers and concerned citizens who are advocates for ensuring that every middle school and high school in the country is teaching a curriculum on preventing dating relationship violence and abuse. MADE was launched in December of 2008; a collaboration between Liz Claiborne, Inc. and the parents of Lindsay Ann Burke, murdered in 2005 by her ex-boyfriend. Only twenty-five percent (25%) of teens report having attended a course on dating abuse in their school and only thirty-percent (30%) of parents say their child's school provides resources.<sup>1</sup> I have attached some of the information available from MADE; much of the work has already been done—it's time

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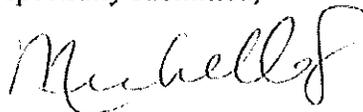
<sup>1</sup> MADE: [www.loveisnotabuse.com/made/index.html](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/made/index.html)

now to begin to educate our children by mandating schools to educate on teen dating violence.

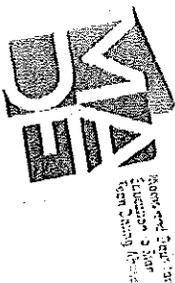
Finally, we need to educate our school administrators, teachers, counselors and other staff on how to recognize the signs of teen dating violence and of the services that are available throughout the state, including the eighteen (18) domestic violence member programs. Although statistics show that a teen involved in a violent dating relationship is more likely to confide in a peer, the educational community must be well equipped, knowledgeable and prepared in their response to any incidents of teen dating violence or domestic violence.

Raised House Bill No. 6494 will provide teenagers with knowledge of teen dating violence and guidance for choosing healthy relationships. I strongly urge the committee's support of this important proposal. Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michelle Cruz".

Michelle Cruz, Esq.  
State Victim Advocate

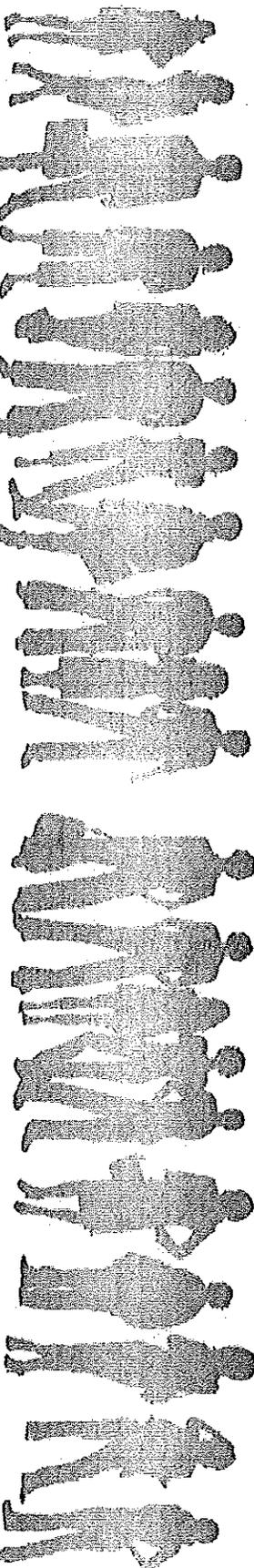


## MADE (MOMS AND DADS FOR EDUCATION) TO STOP TEEN DATING ABUSE

is national coalition of parents, teachers, teens and concerned citizens devoted to ending teen dating violence and abuse through education. ANYONE can join MADE and EVERYONE can make a difference. MADE's goal is to ensure that every middle and high school in the country is teaching a curriculum on teen dating violence and abuse.

Inspired by the courageous and dedicated parents whose children have been victims of relationship violence, Liz Claborn Inc. launched MADE in December, 2008. Ann and Chris Burke, parents and educators from Providence, RI, who lost their own daughter Lindsay Ann to dating violence in 2005, serve as MADE's co-directors.

Today MADE has thousands of members working to ensure that all teens are educated about dating violence and abuse. MADE is working with the National Founda-



tion for Women Legislators (NFWL) to introduce and pass legislation on teen dating violence and abuse in every state. This past year legislation on teen dating violence education was passed in New Mexico, Maryland, Oklahoma, Hawaii and Georgia, and legislation is pending in Connecticut, Ohio, New York, Michigan and South Carolina. However, even where legislation was passed on this issue, very few states actually mandate schools to teach all students about relationship violence. There is more we need to do in EVERY state to ensure all teens' safety.

MADE's national partners include the Joyful Heart Foundation, The National Foundation for Women Legislators (NFWL), Redbook magazine, Seventeen magazine, The National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG), Do Something, and Love+Respect, the National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline.

Teen dating violence is a public health epidemic impacting 13 million teens.

67% of teens report that their parents do not know what to do if their child is being sexually abused.

80% of teens report that their parents do not know what to do if their child is being sexually abused.

90% of teens report that their parents do not know what to do if their child is being sexually abused.

The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Division of Violence Prevention, and Ann & Chris Burke

## WHAT YOU CAN DO TO END TEEN DATING VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

- Join MADE by visiting [www.loveisnotabuse.com/made/petition.html](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/made/petition.html).
- Enlist your friends, colleagues and neighbors to join MADE.
- Get involved with your state MADE chapter and support legislative efforts that call on middle schools and high schools to teach teen dating violence curricula.
- Contact schools where you live and ask them to teach a curriculum on teen dating violence. The Love Is Not Abuse curriculum is free of charge and can be obtained by visiting [www.loveisnotabuse.com](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com). It is typically taught by health or English language arts teachers and is easily incorporated into any course.
- Utilize the MADE online toolkit ([www.loveisnotabuse.com/made/takeaction.html](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/made/takeaction.html)) for sample letters, useful statistics and additional information that make spreading the word about teen dating violence and abuse and MADE as easy as possible.

# BUILDING A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Everyone's talking about MADE including Oprah, Good Morning America, The Today Show, The CBS Early Show and The New York Times.

*"We're incredibly proud of [MADE's] amazing accomplishments. Still, there are more battles to fight to protect our teens from abuse."*

-Rebecka, September 2009 issue

*"States need to open their doors to the truth about teen dating violence, so it can be taught in every middle school and high school in the country. The curriculum already exists and is ready to be distributed. Why are we waiting?"*

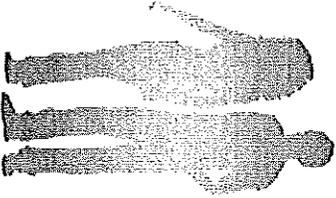
Bill Mitchell

Mervin and MADE State Action League are father of Kristin Mitchell who was murdered by her boyfriend in 2005.

*"This national coalition reinforces the need for mandated teen dating violence curricula nationwide that can, ultimately, save lives."*

Chris and Ann Burke

Founding Members, MADE



*"We are proud to be a part of MADE and to lend our voices to this critical national movement to educate our youth about teen dating abuse. Through our healing work with survivors at the Joyful Heart Foundation, we see firsthand the effect that education can have in empowering individuals. By educating our teens about abusive relationships, we can provide them the insight and guidance early on to ensure that they never become victims."*

Mariska Hargitay

Actor and President, & Founder of the Joyful Heart Foundation

Peter Hermann

Actor and Joyful Heart Foundation Board Member

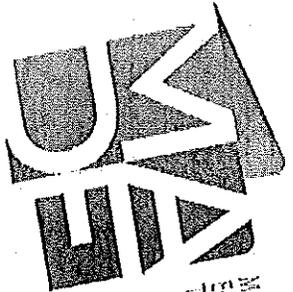


*"Our mission is to ensure that every teenager in this country, as well as their parents, receive the saving information on what it means to be in a healthy relationship and how to safely end abusive relationships. To ensure this happens, corporations, government, and non-profit organizations and the public-at-large need to unite to transform communities and end the violence."*

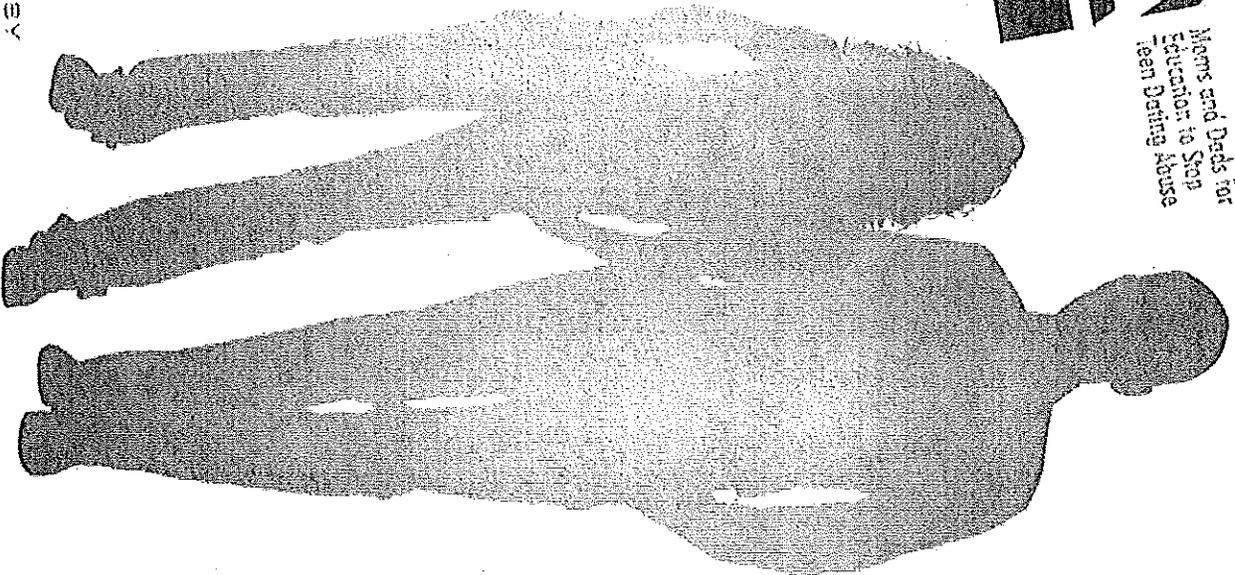
Jane Randel

VP Corporate Communications

Liz Claiborne Inc.



Moms and Dads for Education to Stop Teen Dating Abuse



## NOW, IT'S YOUR TURN!

MADE has come a long way, but there's more to be done. Join TODAY.

For more information contact: [made@liz.com](mailto:made@liz.com) Or visit: [www.loveisnotabuse.com/made](http://www.loveisnotabuse.com/made)

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1-800-331-9474 1-800-331-8468 TTY

love is respect.org  
National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline



THE CONVERSATION

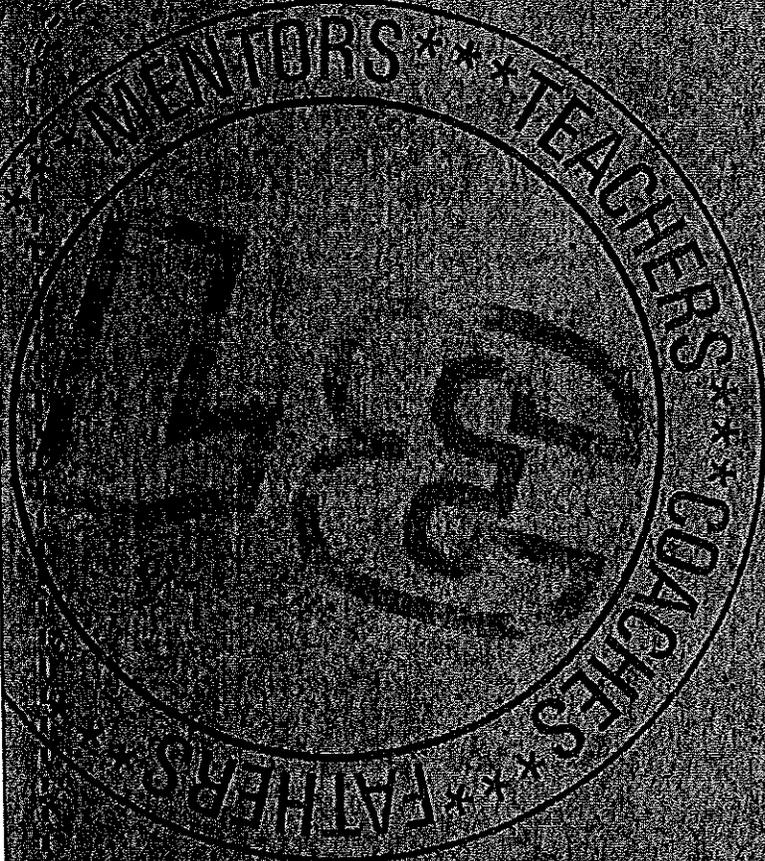
TO START

QUESTIONS

TO TEEN DATING VIOLENCE:

A PARENT'S GUIDE





What boys need to know  
about relationship abuse