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Testimony of Speaker of the House Christopher G. Donovan
To the Judiciary and Human Services Committees in support of:
HB 5497, *AAC the Recommendations of the Speaker of the House of Representatives' Task Force on Domestic Violence* and
HB 5246, *AAC Distribution of the Marriage License Surcharge and Changes to the Landlord and Tenant Statutes to Benefit Victims of Domestic Violence*
March 15, 2010

Good morning Representative Lawlor, Senator McDonald, Representative Walker, Senator Doyle, and members of the Judiciary and Human Services Committees.

I appreciate the opportunity to express my strong support for HB 5497, *AAC the Recommendations of the Speaker of the House of Representatives' Task Force on Domestic Violence* and HB 5246, *AAC Distribution of the Marriage License Surcharge and Changes to the Landlord and Tenant Statutes to Benefit Victims of Domestic Violence*. These two bills, along with HB 5315, *AAC Education and the Reduction of Domestic Violence,* comprise a three bill package drafted from the recommendations of the bipartisan, bicameral Task Force on Domestic Violence. These proposals have been shaped by the input of dozens of advocates, survivors, law enforcement officers, support service providers and state agency staff working on the front lines of these issues.

On average Connecticut sees 20-25 murders related to domestic violence each year—I think we can all agree that's 20-25 deaths that should never occur. Recently, it has seemed that a new incident of domestic violence has surfaced nearly every day. In fact, since the beginning of 2010, there have been eight alleged homicides linked to domestic violence. That's eight tragic deaths in just ten weeks, and there are many more victims whose struggles with family violence go unreported. As a state, we can do more to prevent these tragedies.

The recent spate of incidents has brought weaknesses in the system into focus. The legislation proposed by the task force will lead to meaningful changes aimed at preventing and addressing family and teen dating violence and empowering educators, service providers, law enforcement, state agencies, and survivors with new tools. Some of these solutions are new and some are recommendations you have heard before, but I cannot think of a better time to implement changes that will move our state forward in addressing these crimes.

<u>HB 5497 (Judiciary Committee)</u>
HB 5497 improves interagency sharing of information, strengthens the enforcement of protective orders, and gives victims employment protection so they can use their leave time to deal with domestic-violence related issues.

In addition to removing barriers to communication among the variety of agencies involved in family violence cases, this bill facilitates the recognition of Connecticut's protective orders by law enforcement in other states under the nationwide Project Passport initiative. The bill also ensures that judges have access to the protective

order registry and information on offenses committed within the last ten years and in other states, over and above the current 5-year in-state look back period for persistent offenders.

The legislation also strengthens the enforcement of protective orders by permitting judges to order GPS monitoring of domestic violence offenders who carry a high risk of violation. In addition to allowing law enforcement to monitor the offenders, these devices are designed to notify victims in live time that an order has been broken, so that they can take action to protect themselves. Acknowledging that victims are often overwhelmed with the tasks required to ensure their safety and wellbeing, the legislation also permits victims to use their paid and unpaid leave time to make court appearances, relocate to secure housing, and obtain medical and counseling services, without fear of losing their jobs.

Finally, this legislation encourages the Judicial Branch to develop additional domestic violence dockets within available appropriations. Domestic violence dockets use a multidisciplinary team approach to share information and provide appropriate recommendations on effective penalties. Dedicated domestic violence dockets are already fully operational in seven criminal court locations (Bridgeport, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Stamford, and Waterbury) and under development in Derby and Hartford.

HB 5246 (Human Services Committee)

The economic downturn has resulted in increased demand for domestic violence programming. Connecticut is served by 18 regional programs that provide community education, victim advocacy, support services, and temporary emergency shelter. These programs receive their funding from public and private grants, including a portion of the $20 surcharge assessed on marriage licenses. These fees are distributed to programs by the Department of Social Services. In fiscal year 2009, the domestic violence account at DSS exceeded $1 million, but the funds were not distributed. HB 5246 requires DSS to transfer these funds to programs on an annual basis. This bill also provides resources for 24/7 staffing at domestic violence shelters to meet the needs of our communities. Several shelters have already secured stimulus funds to temporarily provide these services in light of caseload increases. Finally, the bill assists victims in maintaining safe housing by permitting them to defer a rent payment or incur a lower penalty if they need to relocate to ensure their security. I would also encourage the Human Services Committee to consider adding a provision to the bill concerning the use of public service announcements to raise awareness of teen dating and domestic violence.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Rep. Mae Flexer, Chair of the task force and all of the members who have been working tirelessly on these important changes. I would also like to thank the chairs of the Judiciary and Human Services Committee for raising these bills. I urge your continued support for these critical proposals.