

5246



To: Human Services and Judiciary Committee
From: Sandra Koorejian
Date: March 15, 2010
Re: Raised Bill 5246: ACC Distribution of the Marriage License Surcharge and
Changes to the Landlord and Tenant Statutes to Benefit Victims of Domestic
Violence

Good afternoon Senator McDonald, Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sandra Koorejian and I'm the executive director of Domestic Violence Services of Greater New Haven.

On behalf of the board, staff, and clients of DVS, I'm requesting that you consider allocating funding for 24 hour coverage at our shelter and that you also move to ensure that Marriage License Surcharge funds be distributed to our domestic violence programs on an annual basis.

As you know, our programs are unique in the state and all domestic violence agencies supplement the Department of Social Services (DSS) grant with other grants and fundraisers. Fundraising is particularly challenging in this economy, so our dependence on state dollars is more acute. Last year, there was a break-in at our shelter. Fortunately, no one was hurt, the stolen items were recovered, there was minimal damage, and the thief was apprehended. But the incident underscored the fact that as the economy

worsens, people will take desperate steps to get what they want. Traumatized victims deserve to feel safe and secure, and we worry that we won't have the resources to provide this comfort without on-going state support.

Families seeking our help have many needs. Adults and children alike are presenting with mental health and addiction issues. Some take prescription drugs for anxiety and depression. Many have limited job skills and some haven't completed high school. Many are estranged from family and friends. Some regard our staff as family. A former resident wrote to the DVS shelter manager:

"I'm grateful that God put me in your path cause I haven't had somebody to care for me the way you do. I found in you an unconditional friend and also I found the mother I never had...you cared for me without knowing me when you took me in..."

In our last fiscal year (July 2008 through June 2009), DVS staff helped over 7600 victims create plans to enhance their safety, a 13% increase over the previous year. The police in our 13 town service area from Milford to Madison logged 2598 domestic violence arrest incidents in 2008, an 11% increase over 2007. And this is just the tip of the iceberg.

DVS appreciates the state's support of our work over the years. We are struggling to keep these essential services to victims free and available 24/7. More than ever before, we need the state's funding as a critical base for our operations. Thank you.