

Shannon R. Lane, MSW, PhD
Judiciary and Human Services Committees Joint Public Hearing, March 15, 2010
Testimony Re: HB 5246: Concerning distribution of the marriage license surcharge and changes to the landlord and tenant statutes to benefit victims of domestic violence

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker, and Human Service committee members, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, thank you for your time.

My name is Shannon Lane. I am an assistant professor at the Adelphi University School of Social Work and a resident of Ansonia, Connecticut. In 2007-2008, I was the project coordinator for the National Domestic Violence Shelter Study, a joint project of the National Institutes of Justice, the National Resource Center for Domestic Violence, and the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. This research surveyed 3,400 survivors of domestic violence in eight states, including Connecticut, who were clients of domestic violence shelters.¹ I should note that the information presented here is based on that research, and is not the official position of Adelphi University.

I support the recommendations of the Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence in bills HB 5246 and HB 5497 and applaud the difficult work that Representative Flexer and the task force have done this year. In particular, I am here to speak today about the housing needs of domestic violence survivors and to ask you to support the provisions of HB 5246 that would allow flexibility for survivors of domestic violence in finding safe housing situations when necessary.

In our study of domestic violence survivors, the most common concern was, not surprisingly, safety. However, a close second was a need for housing, cited by 83% of survivors who came to shelters. Financial concerns were also paramount, with 57% asking for help with job or job training and 54% expressing a need for help related to budgeting and money matters. A survivor's ability to leave his or her abuser is related to financial status, and for many, is complicated by economic abuse.

Economic abuse involves behaviors that control a person's ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources, thus threatening their economic security and potential for self-sufficiency. In addition to interfering with education, job skills, and employment, abusers may also prevent a partner from acquiring assets, for example, by refusing to put the partner's name on car titles. An abuser may also steal their partner's money, create costs that the survivor becomes responsible for, or generate debt in their partner's name.²

¹ Lyon, E., Lane, S.R., & Menard, A. (2008). *Meeting survivors' needs: A multi-state study of domestic violence shelter experiences*. Available at http://new.vawnet.org/category/index_pages.php?category_id=936

² Adams, A., Sullivan, C.M., Bybee, D., Greeson, M.R. (2008). Development of the Scale of Economic Abuse. *Violence Against Women, 14*(5), 563-588.

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As a result of economic abuse and other financial hardships, many survivors in our study eloquently described their fears related to housing and homelessness. Many were concerned that leaving their abuser would leave them with choices such as living in a car, staying in a homeless shelter, moving from bed to bed with friends or families, or living on the streets. Given these poor choices, many felt unable to leave their abusers. In their own words, respondents said:

- [Without this program, I] would've gone back because of co-dependence financially.
- [I would] be at a homeless shelter or begging friends to stay with them, and putting them at risk of abuse by my ex-boyfriend.
- [I would have to sleep] in my vehicle in sub-freezing weather without food or drink or warm blankets, pillow, shower, soap, clean clothes etc.
- [I'd] be sleeping in my car, lose my children and my job.
- [I would have] stayed with my abuser and continued to get beat everyday.
- Probably I would have been killed. Cause I had nowhere else to go. If I would have stayed with my other half, I would have been killed most likely.
- I would be dead I think.

The housing provisions of this bill will not eradicate this problem, but they will provide more opportunity for survivors, particularly those in a tenuous financial situation, to change their housing in order to increase their safety. For some survivors, one-half's month rent or one-half of their security deposit will be the difference between the security deposit on a new, safer place to live or feeling forced financially to stay in an unsafe situation. For some survivors, the ability to leave an apartment at the safest time, without a month's notice, will allow them to leave safely without potential confrontations with their abuser.

I urge your support of this legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

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