



**Testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz
Judiciary and Human Services Committee Joint Public Hearing
March 15, 2010**

Good morning Chairman McDonald, Chairman Lawlor, Chairman Doyle, Chairman Walker, ranking members, and distinguished members of the Judiciary and Human Services Committees.

For the record, my name is Susan Bysiewicz, and I am the Secretary of the State. I am pleased to submit this written testimony to you in support of *HB 5246*.

HB 5246: AN ACT CONCERNING DISTRIBUTION OF THE MARRIAGE LICENSE SURCHARGE AND CHANGES TO THE LANDLORD AND TENANT STATUTES TO BENEFIT VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

According to the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CADV), between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009, more than 56,636 victims of domestic violence sought counseling, shelter, and support from the 18 programs statewide that provide services to such victims each year. According to CADV, this was an increase of over 9,000 cases (from 47,471 the previous fiscal year).

While the challenging economy may have been a factor to account for this increase, it is safe to say that increased awareness and education has prompted more victims to come forth and seek help. Victims are now more likely to seek counseling and support in coping with increased stress caused by the difficult economic climate we are facing.

Needless to say, CADV also reports that according to one of its domestic violence programs, requests for resource services, counseling, workshops, and self-esteem programs went up nearly 25 percent--from 1,038 in 2007-08 to 1,259 last in 2008-09. This trend may only worsen as family stress related to loss of jobs, mounting bills, and lack of job opportunities continues to rise in the coming months.

According to a recent national survey, the incidence of domestic violence increased from 4.7 percent to 7.5 percent when a male family member experienced a period of unemployment or severe underemployment, and that it rose up to 9.5 percent as a result of high financial strain resulting from a prolonged period or successive periods of unemployment.

Not surprisingly, domestic violence programs will continue to struggle to meet the huge demand for shelter and support services especially in our current economy. But as needs have increased nearly two-fold for some of the shelter programs, their funding has either remained the same or even decreased.

Given these growing demands, I commend the House Speaker's Legislative Task Force on Domestic Violence for its recommendations to address this and other domestic violence issues.

Legislation that imposes penalties on criminal threatening and harassment, teaches young children and youth about healthy relationships and mutual respect, provides for workplace allowances for victims, provides for GPS monitoring of domestic violence offenders, creates additional domestic violence units and dockets in our courts, and provides for counseling to domestic violence offenders are all excellent measures to address the escalating violence we see every day. I am pleased that these various bill are under consideration by the General Assembly.

Specifically, HB 5246 ensures that the 18 domestic violence shelters across the state that are in the forefront of support and assistance to victims receive much-needed funding out of the marriage license surcharge adopted by Public Act 92-203.

HB 5246 will require a municipal registrar to turn over \$19 of the \$20 marriage certificate surcharge funds to the Department of Public Health on or before the tenth day of the month following each calendar quarter.

It requires for these receipts to be deposited into an account of the State Treasurer and credited to the General Fund. This non-lapsing account, established by the Comptroller, is to be used by the Department of Social Services for shelter services to the victims of household abuse in accordance with section 17b-850 and by the Department of Public Health for rape crisis services funded under section 19a-2a.

The bill further requires for the Commissioners of Social Services and Public Health to distribute such funds to the recipient organizations in accordance with such allocations not later than October fifteenth, annually.

As you know, in the past these domestic abuse shelter and rape crisis center programs have not received these funds as expected, creating a gap in revenue that they cannot afford to have. HB 5246 remedies this problem, and in so doing ensures that domestic violence and rape crisis programs will receive the money they are entitled to promptly and when most needed.

I commend both Committees and the legislature for making this a priority in this legislative session and strongly urge you to pass HB 5246.

Thank you for the important work you are doing on behalf of Connecticut citizens.

Respectfully,

Susan Bysiewicz
Secretary of the State

DeMaio, Barbara

From: Ramos, Valeriano [Valeriano.Ramos@ct.gov]
Sent: Friday, March 19, 2010 3:45 PM
To: DeMaio, Barbara
Cc: Gilman, Michelle
Subject: Testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz for the March 15, 2010 Judiciary and Human Services Committees Public Hearing
Attachments: Testimony in support of HB 5246 regarding surcharge fees for domestic violence shelter programs.doc

Ms. DeMaio:

Attached please find the testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz for the joint hearing held on Monday, March 15, 2010 held by the Human Services and Judiciary Committees.

We appreciate your willingness to accept this testimony and thank you for your kind assistance.

Attentively,

Valeriano Ramos, M.A.
Director of Constituent Services