

Testimony of April Raczka, MS MFT
SACS Director, New Britain and Hartford region Sexual Assault Crisis Service
YWCA New Britain
Human Services Committee, March 2, 2010

Testimony regarding:

SB 315 AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL ASSAULT OF A DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED OR SEVERELY PHYSICALLY DISABLED PERSON.

Good morning, my name is April Raczka. I am the Director of New Britain and Hartford region Sexual Assault Crisis Services, a free and confidential provider of counseling and victim advocacy to a 45-plus town region. We provide crisis counseling, education and advocacy to individuals affected by sexual violence and their loved ones. I am here today in support of SB 315 AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL ASSAULT OF A DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED OR SEVERELY PHYSICALLY DISABLED PERSON. I am also a family therapist and have worked in group home settings as a provider of advanced behavioral work. I have nearly 10 years experience in working with victims of sexual violence and abuse and over 15 years experience working with the developmentally disabled population.

I am here to report that it has been my experience in working with this population that in over 97-99% cases where assault or sexual abuse has occurred, the perpetrator is someone the victim knows.¹ Not only do they know them, but they are often the caregiver, staff member at a facility, or another individual entrusted with their care. Our office has seen a significant number of victims who are developmentally disabled, in fact approximately 10-15% of the 720 clients provided with services last year identified as developmentally disabled in some way. There have been a few instances where a victim with a developmental disability was seeking a romantic relationship, and because of their past trauma due to other previous assaults and their vulnerability as group who is often expected to comply with what is "expected" on a date, they are often victimized sadly before they are able to know what a healthy relationship is like. I say comply because in a group home setting or when individuals with disabilities are learning to succeed on their own or learning social skills, they often are learning to do as others expect, or as society expects. They often do not feel they have a right to say no or even to convey non-verbal cues that say no, out of fear or anxiety and distress. This is a population that is especially vulnerable under pressure or in a traumatic situation as they often have not been able to speak for themselves either verbally or non-verbally. This makes them all that more vulnerable, and it makes it all the more important that the law acknowledges that they sometimes have difficulty resisting or consenting.

I can tell you that in all my experiences in working with the disability community, it is most disturbing to know that these are the individuals who lack rights and respect the most in our society, and these are the same people who are abused the most. This is a population that often is ignored, and therefore the risk of incidence of abuse is between 4-10 times

¹ Baladarian, N. "Sexual Abuse of People with Developmental Disabilities." *Sexuality and Disability* 9.4 (1991): 323 – 335.

higher than that of other adults.² Many of these men and women were also victimized as children and learned that no one listened to them then due to their disability and therefore find it nearly impossible to come forward now. When they have spoken up, their credibility is often questioned, and even with good advocacy they are often not believed.

I support Senate Bill 315, because it is my hope that victims with developmental and severe physical disabilities will one day not have to face this trauma, but if they do, their voices will not be silenced.

Thank you.

² Sobset, D. "Violence and abuse in the lives of people with disabilities: The end of silent acceptance?" Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company, 1994.