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*TESTIMONY OF
ATTORNEY GENERAL RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
MARCH 15, 2010*

I appreciate the opportunity to support House Bill 5496, An Act Concerning Restraining Orders for the Protection of Family Violence Victims in the Workplace and House Bill 5497, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Speaker of the House of Representatives Task Force on Domestic Violence.

Family violence is a horrific crime. Victims often suffer lasting, severe physical injuries, even death -- as we have seen recently in Connecticut. The aggressor knows where the victim lives and works. Family members remain unsafe in their own homes and even at their workplaces.

The growing incidence of domestic violence has reached epidemic proportions, exacerbated by economic pressure, anger and anxiety.

The statistics are staggering. In Connecticut, there are more than 50,000 victims of domestic violence each year, according to the Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence, and the impact is not simply on adults but also children who witness the assaults or are abused themselves.

In partnership with Interval House, I recently helped initiate a program called Men Against Domestic Violence, combining leaders from a broad range of backgrounds such as police chiefs, business owners, media representatives, educators and others. Family violence is not solely a women's issue. Most aggressors are male, and men have a duty and responsibility to speak out and stand up against domestic violence, sending a strong message to all boys, teens and adult males.

Domestic violence is a cycle that must be broken by role models, community outreach and compelling leadership. The most telling statistic about this epidemic is that more than 70 percent of men who batter women or children have seen or experienced such abuse in their own lives. In breaking this cycle, stronger laws are necessary to support private and public programs.

In one of the most critically important initiatives this year, House Bill 5947 would authorize a court to require electronic monitoring of the person who is subject to a restraining order. All too often restraining orders are violated with impunity. Time after time, restraining

orders fail to deter aggressors from attacking. Electronic monitoring enables the victim and law enforcement to take preventive measures.

House Bill 5497 also broadens the court authority to provide and receive information regarding domestic violence from various sources, including family relations counselors. In addition, the legislation authorizes disclosure by the court's family violence intervention unit of any relevant information to the state's attorney, the Department of Children and Families and other law enforcement agencies. Finally, the legislation allows the court -- in appropriate circumstances -- to issue a standing criminal protective order, extending for a period of time set by the court.

These measures are desperately necessary -- and needed now -- to combat the epidemic of violence against women and children.

Irrefutable statistics show the need. Some 20,000 employees nationwide were victims of family violence, harassment or abuse in their workplaces; 70% of family violence victims were also harassed at their workplaces in addition to their homes. The first number is from a review of United States Department of Justice statistics from 1992 through 1996. The second statistic is from an American Institute on Domestic Violence report in 2002.

House Bill 5497 would require employers to provide paid or unpaid leave for any employee who is a victim of family violence when such leave is reasonably necessary to seek mental or physical health care, to move to a new home or participate in a court proceeding related to family violence. In a highly significant step, House Bill 5496 would allow businesses to seek a protective order for an employee who is the victim of family violence. These provisions recognize the need to provide better protection for victims at their place of employment.

I urge the committee's favorable consideration of House Bill 5496 and House Bill 5497.