



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
In Support of SB 63 AN ACT MANDATING EMPLOYERS PROVIDE PAID SICK
LEAVE TO EMPLOYEES**

Anna Doroghazi, Director of Public Policy and Communication
Labor and Public Employees Committee, February 25, 2010

Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and honorable members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Anna Doroghazi, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Communication for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide association of nine community-based rape crisis centers in Connecticut. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services. In furtherance of that mission, CONNSACS strongly supports SB 63 AN ACT MANDATING EMPLOYERS PROVIDE PAID SICK LEAVE TO EMPLOYEES.

Survivors of sexual violence face great obstacles in the aftermath of their assaults. The repercussions of victimization can take a lifetime to overcome, yet many survivors cannot afford to take even a single day off of work. 44% of private sector workers in Connecticut do not have paid sick days¹, and when these workers are the victims of sexual violence, many have to choose between receiving the care they need to heal and the income they need to survive. SB 63 would allow survivors of sexual violence and members of their immediate families to use paid time off for emergency medical care, counseling, and legal responsibilities associated with their victimization.

In preparing my testimony for today, I reached out to members of the Victim/Survivor Advisory Council, a volunteer group of sexual assault survivors who provide CONNSACS with input on services, publications, and public policy initiatives. When asked how a lack of paid sick days impacted victims of sexual violence, one survivor provided this powerful response:

“When I fled my abuser, who had raped me and kept me captive for three days, I went into the Prudence Crandall Safe House. I had to call out sick from work for numerous reasons, including the after effects of the rape I had suffered. I didn’t have paid time off and lost money at a time when I desperately needed financial resources.”

For women and men without paid sick days, the decision to flee or remain with an abusive partner puts many survivors in the position of choosing between safety and a paycheck. For rape survivors, the inability to take a paid day off could mean that there is not enough time for a forensic exam and evidence collection before it’s time to report to work. Without paid time off,

¹ The National Partnership for Women and Families. Everyone Gets Sick. Everyone Needs Time to Get Better. Washington, DC: NPWF, April 2008.

the parent of a child victim may face the heart-wrenching choice of taking the child to counseling or earning the money needed for continued care. No one benefits when members of our community have to make these sorts of decisions in the aftermath of a sexual assault.

Fortunately, for some Connecticut workers, the decision to take care of themselves and their families is facilitated by employers who provide paid time off. One member of the Victim/Survivor Advisory Council who benefited from paid sick time recounted:

“When my daughter was raped at the age of fourteen, I was a single mother of three working full-time. If I had not had paid sick leave and an understanding boss, my life would have been in ruins. Paid sick leave for victims and their families is invaluable. The crime itself has such a detrimental impact on our lives, that to deal with unpaid leave and risk of losing one’s job is unthinkable, especially when therapy and court dates and more therapy are involved – all of which should be covered under sick time. It is a sick crime, which makes each of us sick in many different ways.”

While SB 63 would have obvious advantages for survivors of sexual violence, its benefits do not stop there. Employers profit from workers who are healthy and whole. Communities are safer when victims can afford the time to prosecute their offenders. Society is stronger when its members have time to heal in the aftermath of unthinkable abuse. In the words of another Victim/Survivor Advisory Council member:

“In 1991, I came face to face with my childhood issues and was devastated. At that time, my employer allowed me great flexibility with my schedule which allowed me to meet my personal needs such as meeting with counselors, lawyers and doctors, while continuing to meet my responsibilities at work. Had I not been blessed with the opportunity to retain my position while going through the process, my employers would have lost a valuable employee, and my financial burden may have proven insurmountable, putting me at the mercy of the state.”

19% of Connecticut residents will experience some form of sexual assault in their lifetime². These survivors hold jobs in engineering, food services, finance, education – all sectors of the Connecticut economy suffer the impact of sexual violence. When survivors cannot afford the time to heal, employers lose money in the form of lost productivity and employee turnover. Providing victims of rape and sexual assault with a few paid days off of work is a sensible business proposition. It is one small way to support survivors during their time of crisis. It is the right thing to do.

Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services enthusiastically supports SB 63 AN ACT MANDATING EMPLOYERS PROVIDE PAID SICK LEAVE TO EMPLOYEES and encourages members of the legislature to do the same. I would be happy to answer any questions that the committee might have about this bill and its impact on survivors of sexual violence.

Thank you.

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² Macro International, Inc. *Sexual Assault Attitudes and Experiences Study*. Burlington, VT: Macro International, 2000.