

Raised House Bill No. 5485, An Act Concerning the Office of the Victim Advocate

March 19, 2010

This testimony is in regards to the OVA. This agency was very instrumental in my court case. I was at first appointed an advocate through the Rockville Court. This all began in March 2008, following the arrest of my partner for domestic violence in my home. Although the court assured me an advocate would contact me prior or the day of his arraignment no one did. Therefore no statement was received on that day. The advocate didn't keep me apprised of court dates nor kept me informed of what was going on. June of 2008, I lost my patience with the whole court. I kept calling the advocate but no calls were being returned. July of 2008, I called and finally asked to speak to a supervisor; she explained that advocate had left over a month ago. No one could locate any correspondence I had provided to her. No letters; no call records; nothing. In August, a NEW advocate was supposed to meet me at the court house; this was also the date of an appearance by my violator. My first time in the court and I was alone. I had also sent letters to the state attorney's office questioning where my protection order was; the Judge had ordered one, but I never received it. The restraining order I received in civil court was now expired. So that day I had to go to the clerk's office to attain a copy, as the court mailed it to my street address with no PO Box, so I never received it. Keep in mind, first time present in court and the violator was there, I was alone, the advocate never showed up. As a victim, I was scared, intimidated and more or less treated as if I had done something wrong and shouldn't be there. Fear and humiliation is what I felt. I came home upset, but vowed that I would see this through no matter what. This is the second time I've had him arrested and he is becoming more violent and if he is let go this time, I might not be here a year from now. I got on the computer and searched and emailed anything associated with domestic violence victims. Two replies came back out of 28 emails; one said they couldn't help me to seek out legal help. The other was not in this area. I kept searching and although I had come across the OVA website, due to the Hartford location, I assumed it was for Hartford County, as others I had contacted told me to call the court. I am in Tolland County. I was also told I needed to contact the Rockville Court and the agency of advocates they use. I thought what the heck I emailed everyone else and didn't get anywhere, let me try the OVA. Two hours after I sent it, I got a reply. I had a name, a phone number and an email that said: YES, I can help you please call me. That name was Merit Lajoie. Date Oct. 08. From that point on I was not only informed of my rights, but kept aware of all court dates and what was going on. I requested a meeting with the prosecutor and Merit kept on it until one was granted. She went with me to court, answered what questions she could and what ones she couldn't would get answers. He was convicted in August of 2009, a very long 17 month process, too long if you ask me. 2nd Degree Assault and interfering with a emergency call. I do not want to get into details of what he did, it's done and over. This is to let every Victim know WE NEED this AGENCY without it a victim is STILL a victim. WE DO NOT HAVE A VOICE without it. WE do not GET ANSWERS without it. WE DO NOT HEAL without it. WE cannot make educated decisions without information on the process. Law enforcement, as well as prosecutors, complain that VICTIMS do not step up. VICTIMS are just that, for good reason, they will remain victims without answers

and support. Without the OVA I sincerely doubt he would have been prosecuted. THE REASON: I would have become frustrated and gave up. RESULT: He'd still be doing it, if not to me to another person. I am no longer interested in what he did to me. I am however fighting for all others in his past and future he will or has done this too. The OVA recognizes the need for victims to feel safe, to be allowed fear, that it really is NOT our fault that this has happened. Keep in mind this CRIME is growing. All this agency, I and other victims are trying to do is to keep your daughters, mother, sisters and all other families from having to feel like a VICTIM. We want them to feel safe, make good decisions for themselves throughout the court process to understand without prosecution the violator gains strength to keep doing it. I might also add the violator becomes, from my experience, more aggressive and more violent, when there is no consequence for his behavior. I hope everyone understands there can only be hope through progress and that is what the OVA promotes.

Thank you for your time and understanding. Please keep this agency free so that all victims can have help and answers as well as feel human.

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