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**Testimony of the CT Chapter of the National Organization for Women (CT NOW)  
Before the Judiciary Committee  
March 15, 2010**

Re: H.B. 5497, AAC the Recommendations of the Speaker of the House of Representatives' Task Force on Domestic Violence

The CT Chapter of the National Organization for Women (CT NOW) strongly supports H.B. 5497, AAC the Recommendations of the Speaker of the House of Representatives' Task Force on Domestic Violence. We would like to commend the Speaker for recognizing the urgency of this issue and we applaud Representative Mae Flexer for her chairmanship of the task force. Domestic violence is an enormous problem facing our state and our nation that has only worsened in recent years. While we know that a recession does not *cause* violence against women, the economic stress caused by a financial downturn can make it harder than ever for a woman to escape her abuser, and cuts in funding can mean that the supports once available in her community may no longer exist. The recession does mean that the resources needed to support victims of domestic violence are more and more scarce.

The Speaker's Task Force has done an admirable job of working within the constraints imposed by the state's fiscal situation and has put forth thoughtful, viable proposals to address this problem. Most importantly, the Task Force has considered not only how to better protect women from violence, but also how to prevent such violence from occurring in the first place. While bringing shelters up to 24/7 staffing may seem like a strain on current resources, the effort is well worth it to ensure victims are supported at all hours of the day and that shelter staff is not stretched so thin as to be ineffective. One common-sense solution to the funding problem is the Task Force's recommendation to expedite the distribution of the Marriage License Surcharge funds to support shelters. The measures aimed at improving victims' experience with the criminal justice system are laudable, as victims can often feel intimidated and overwhelmed by the intricacies of the courts. Greater information sharing among agencies, improved enforcement of protective orders, and GPS monitoring will go a long way toward easing the frustration and pitfalls of the current system.

We live in a culture that glorifies violence, especially toward women. As a society, we must take steps to ensure that violence is not tolerated and that young people have the tools to address these issues. The proposal to include a teen dating violence curriculum in our schools is an excellent step in the right direction. Everyone in the community must be engaged in this work, including employers. We know that many victims are threatened, stalked and even assaulted by their abuser

at their workplace, which is why enhancement of protections for employees is another critical element of the picture.

We strongly endorse the measures outlined in this legislation and are encouraged to see the report's recommendations for further research into initiatives aimed at reducing domestic violence to be undertaken in the future. Thank you.