



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

96 Pitkin Street • East Hartford, CT 06108 • Phone: 860-282-9881 • Fax: 860-291-9335 • www.connsacs.org

**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
In Support of SB 153 AN ACT PROVIDING SAFE HARBOR
FOR EXPLOITED CHILDREN**

Anna Doroghazi, Director of Public Policy and Communication
Select Committee on Children Public Hearing, Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Senator Musto, Representative Urban, and honorable members of the Select Committee on Children, 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.

When children under the age of seventeen are engaged in prostitution, it is difficult to imagine that their participation does not involve coercion as defined in Section 53a – 192 of the Connecticut General Statutes¹. Coerced sex is rape, and victims of sexual violence should be protected, not prosecuted, under Connecticut law. SB 153 AN ACT PROVIDING SAFE HARBOR FOR EXPLOITED CHILDREN provides this protection.

Teen and child survivors of sexual violence face myriad barriers to disclosing their abuse, including fear for their safety, fear of not being believed, and fear of being blamed for their victimization. They should not also have to fear prosecution if they reach out for support and assistance. The proposed Safe Harbor law would remove one of the many barriers that exist for children who want to leave an exploitive situation. Presuming coercion in child prostitution cases removes blame from young victims and places it on those who are truly culpable – the pimps who profit from the abuse of minors and the johns who pay to hurt children.

A Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report found that between January 2007 and September 2008, 31.8% of all human trafficking cases in the United States involved child prostitution². Although it is possible for any child to become the victim of sexual exploitation, certain populations are more at risk to become involved in prostitution. A 2002 University of Pennsylvania study found that “among runaway and homeless youth, approximately 30% of shelter youth and 70% of street youth engaged in prostitution in order to meet their daily needs

¹ §53a-192(a) A person is guilty of coercion when he compels or induces another person to engage in conduct which such other person has a legal right to abstain from engaging in, or to abstain from engaging in conduct in which such other person has a legal right to engage, by means of instilling in such other person a fear that, if the demand is not complied with, the actor or another will: (1) Commit any criminal offense; or (2) accuse any person of a criminal offense; or (3) expose any secret tending to subject any person to hatred, contempt or ridicule, or to impair any person's credit or business repute; or (4) take or withhold action as an official, or cause an official to take or withhold action.

² United States. Dept. of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Characteristics of Suspected Human Trafficking Incidents, 2007 – 2007. Beck, Cohen, and Kyckelhahn. 15 Jan 2009. Accessed 20 Feb 10 <<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/pdf/cshiti08.pdf>>

for food, shelter, drugs, and the like.”³ When adults take advantage of children who are homeless, hungry, suffering from addiction, or being trafficked, they are preying upon vulnerability, and they alone are accountable for their actions.

Victims are never guilty of their victimization, and young victims of prostitution deserve the protections that would be afforded to them under the proposed Safe Harbor legislation. Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services supports SB 153 AN ACT PROVIDING SAFE HARBOR FOR EXPLOITED CHILDREN and encourages you to do the same.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak with you today.

³ Estes and Weiner. “The Commercial Exploitation of Children in the United States, Canada and Mexico” Executive Summary. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2002.