



To: Appropriations Committee

From: Sharlene Kerelejza

Date: March 4, 2011

Re: H.B. No. 6380 AAC the Budget for the Biennium

Ending June 30, 2013.

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Hamm, Representative Villano and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Sharlene Kerelejza and I am the Executive Director of Meriden- Wallingford Chrysalis. I am here today to speak about House Bill 6380: An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013.

On behalf of our board, staff, and clients, I am here today to thank you for your previous allocation of funding so our agency can provide round the clock services. I would also like to ask you to ensure that this funding remains in place.

As you know, our programs are unique in the state and all domestic violence agencies supplement the Department of Social Services (DSS) grant with other grants and fundraisers. Fundraising is particularly challenging in this economy, so our dependence on state dollars is more acute than ever.

Families seeking our help have many needs. They come to us because they are being abused, or are trying to protect their children from abuse. As their backpack is unpacked, we find so many more issues: Poverty; lack of marketable job skills; under-education;

children with special needs, mental, physical health or substance abuse issues; minimal to no support systems. For themselves and their children they begin to decide between safety and poverty, safety and homelessness, safety and basic needs. They are hurting, estranged, in crisis and need to find someone there and skilled.

Traumatized victims deserve to feel safe and secure, and we won't have the resources to meet these needs without on-going state support. Last fiscal year (July 2009 through June 2010), Chrysalis staff helped over 2,000 victims create plans to enhance their safety, a 10% increase over the previous year. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. The average length of stay at our shelter has increased from 34 to 40 days, a 15% increase. Our number of service contacts with clients has increased by over 75%.

In short, we are seeing more victims of domestic violence and their children. They need more from us and come to us with fewer resources. Your funding support helps us to preserve the inalienable right to life that should be a guarantee to every Connecticut family.

Chrysalis appreciates the state's support of our work over the years. We are struggling to keep these essential services to victims free and available when they are needed. Yet, tonight I also stand in solidarity with every provider of services to the most vulnerable of us. You face some of the most difficult decisions in our history, and I don't envy you. But I must speak plainly. To cut any safety net program or service impacts the families I serve as much as cutting my own agency's budget.

To know this with absolute certainty, all I have to do is look at the children we serve, those exposed to domestic violence who walk in physically or virtually hugging the legs of their caretakers who are trying to protect them. Looking at them, and the long road they will have to a productive life full of opportunity and free from abuse, I ask if we can acknowledge together that what negatively affects the most vulnerable of us also creates more vulnerable futures for us. Preserve domestic violence services, yes. The families who come to us do so because they cannot find the help they need anywhere else. And please preserve the programs and services that surround them, and that give them and their children a chance.

Yesterday, I sat with 29 Meriden and Wallingford Human Service Providers who decided to stand in solidarity. They asked me to ask you to find ways to balance the budget without jeopardizing care to those who need it the most.

Thank You.