TESTIMONY OF JEANNE MILSTEIN, CHILD ADVOCATE
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL 6629,
AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
MARCH 30, 2011

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify **in support of Raised Bill No. 6629, An Act Concerning Domestic Violence.**

I strongly support Raised Bill No. 6629, as it modifies the definition of a "family or household member" who may seek judicial relief from domestic violence to include youth under the age of 18 who are, or have been, involved in teen dating relationships that are characterized by violence - including threats, intimidation, or stalking.

Though there are intensive efforts to heighten awareness of teen dating violence in Connecticut, several sources estimate that as many as 1 in 5 girls under age 18 in our state have been physically or sexually abused by a dating partner; this rate is even higher than that of abuse among adult couples. It is crucial to note that teen dating violence is not confined to heterosexual couples, nor are males always the aggressors. In general, boys and girls abuse their partners in different ways: Girls are more likely to exert emotional control over their partners by yelling, threatening to hurt themselves, pinching, slapping, scratching, or kicking,; boys are more likely to use degrading or sexually coercive language and more severe physical aggression.[1]

Half of all reported date rape occurs among teenagers, and a survey reveals that 46% of 10th graders have submitted to pressure or coercion to engage in sexual behaviors because they were afraid to say no.[2] In adolescents, violence in dating relationships is correlated with increased risk for substance abuse, eating disorders, risky sexual behaviors, pregnancy, and suicidal ideation and attempts.[3]

Solutions to the problems presented by teen dating violence are elusive for many reasons, including reluctance of youth to confide in their parents. Three-quarters of parents are unaware that teen dating violence is a significant issue for adolescents, and more than half of parents have never discussed the topic with their teens. 83% of 10th graders surveyed reported that they would sooner turn to a friend for help with dating violence than to a teacher, counselor, or parents; only 7% said that they would make a report to police.[4]

Additionally, many teens have witnessed domestic violence in their homes. Almost half of men who abuse their wives also abuse their children, and a significant majority of women and girls who are abused by their husbands or boyfriends remain in those relationships even after the onset of violence. Adolescents who have committed or been

victims of dating violence frequently continue those patterns into adult relationships, with the degree of violence becoming increasingly severe.

It is therefore of utmost importance that Connecticut explicitly allow minors to seek protective orders and other judicial relief on their own behalf when they have experienced physical or sexual violence, threatening, intimidation, or stalking in dating relationships, as described in Raised Bill No. 6629. I also contend that it is vitally important for education on teen dating violence to be conducted in all middle and high schools. School personnel should be trained in recognizing the indicators and risk factors associated with dating violence, and assisting teens who may be at risk in their relationships.

To that end, I would be remiss if I failed to mention my enthusiastic **support for Committee Bill No. 6053, An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Child Trauma.** This bill requires that school systems address acts of dating violence involving their students, within and in some circumstances, outside the school setting, in their policies regarding bullying. Schools would be required to develop and implement strategies for prevention and intervention of a wide range of behaviors that negatively impact students' safety or performance in school. Dissemination and implementation of school policies that explicitly describe and prohibit violent, threatening, or coercive behaviors will increase awareness among students and their parents, as well as reassure teens that school employees are available and empowered to assist those who disclose experiencing violence in their relationships.

In closing, I urge the Committee to support Raised Bill No. 6629 and Committee Bill No. 6053, and I thank you for the opportunity to testify. I welcome your questions.

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[1] "Teen Victim Project," National Center for Victims of Crime, www.ncvc.org, 2004.

[2] The Northern Westchester Shelter with Pace Women's Justice Center, April 2003

[3] Jay G. Silverman, PhD, et al, "Dating Violence Against Adolescent Girls and Associated Substance Use, Unhealthy Weight Control, Sexual Risk Behavior, Pregnancy, and Suicidality." Journal of the American Medical Association, (2001).

[4] Tiffany J. Zwicker, Education Policy Brief, "The Imperative of Developing Teen Dating Violence Prevention and Intervention Programs in Secondary Schools." 12 Southern California Review of Law and Womens Studies, 131, (2002).