

**Testimony of Toni DeCoster**  
**Raised Bill 6629: An Act Concerning Domestic Violence**  
**March 30, 2011**

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee.

I would like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to testify today in reference to changes to the Bail Bond System as identified in Raised Bill 6629: An Act Concerning Domestic Violence. My name is Toni DeCoster and I am the mother of a victim of violent crimes.

This is a true story about my daughter, Sara and Eric Stiggle. My daughter Sara is a very accomplished woman. At 18 she bought her first new car on her own, by 20 she was a manager of a business and by 28 she renovated a house and sold it for a profit. She then relocated to California and used her earnings to enhance her education.

Stiggle and my daughter began a relationship in June 2009. He heard about her through a friend of a friend. He told her that he held a masters degree in theology, was a part time minister and donated his time to drug counseling. He also said that he was a business owner and worked for the state full time. Six months later, Sara returned to Connecticut to marry him. Unbeknown to us, Stiggle had been recently released from prison after serving a 10 year sentence for a committing a violent crime against a woman and a police officer.

Within a few days of marriage, the truth started to surface and with that the violence began. Sara was able to escape the abuse and came to stay with me in my home when Stiggle was

arrested in January 2010. Within a few months Stiggle was able to get bonded out without putting down one dime.

On April 15, 2010 in New London, Stiggle found Sara, violently attacked her by choking her and cutting her hand. He then stole her car and led the police on a chase into Rhode Island. The chase ended with a police officer injured and my daughter's car totaled. Stiggle was arrested and a protective order was issued. Stiggle bonded out a few days later, once again without putting down any money.

On May 30, 2010 Stiggle began a horrendous violent attack on my daughter. He forced his way into my home, strangled and stabbed Sara approximately 40 times. He then stole my neighbor's car and kidnapped Sara by forcing her at knife point into the back seat of the car. Sara prevented Stiggle from stabbing a neighbor who tried to stop him, by grabbing the knife with her bare hand slicing her hand open. When the police arrived they treated my home as a murder scene. Sara's blood was everywhere. So much so that once repairs began on my home it took over 3 weeks to complete.

Sara was missing for 30 hours when a witness in Holyoke, Massachusetts spotted the car. A police chase ensued and ended about two hours later near Albany, New York with my neighbor's car being totaled. As Sara was being rescued from the back seat of the car and in front of 12 police officers, Stiggle threatened that "when he gets out he is going to finish killing her!"

Stiggle was extradited to Connecticut and on September 7, 2010, in front of Judge Thim in the

Fairfield JD High Court, a \$1,000,000 bond was placed on the him for the kidnapping and related charges and a protective order was issued. Stiggle threatened that when he got bonded out he would come to my home, that no one could stop him, and that he didn't care about the protective order.

On September 13, 2010, less than one week later, Wilson's Bail Bonds of Bridgeport bonded Stiggle out on a \$1,375,000 bond. Once again, Stiggle was able to get bonded out without putting down one dime. The State's Attorney contacted Wilson's, while they were in the process, telling them that most likely Stiggle was a scam and asked them to verify whatever he was providing them as collateral. Stiggle had provided Wilson's with 2 fraudulent documents, a letter from an attorney stating there was \$378,000 held in escrow for bond and a cashier's check for \$750,000. A few hours later it was discovered that the attorney who had allegedly written the letter had been deceased for four years and that the check was fraudulent. When the bail bondsmen took him to a nearby restaurant to finish filling out the paperwork for his release, he took the letter and the check and escaped through the bathroom window.

I was immediately placed in Witness Protection and was briefed on the steps that may be need to make it permanent. I would have to change my name, give up my home, my business and my family and friends. Sara left the state and was staying with family for her own protection.

Stiggle was arrested a few days later and on September 21, 2010 he once again faced Judge Thim who changed his bond to a cash only bond. Stiggle tried to attack the judge and threatened to kill the judge and the state's attorney. The judge gave him a 6 month sentence for contempt of

court which ended 1 week ago on March 20, 2011.

In December 2010 during my daughter's divorce hearing, Stiggle continued to threatened that when his sentence was up he would come to my house. He stated again that no one can stop him. He had previously threatened to kill me and to burn my house down. He also knew that my neighbors were all witnesses and were going to be testifying against him.

He has stated that the bond system is a joke. That he has always gotten out without putting up any money. That all you need is one bondsman to fall for your story. He claims he will get out this way again, cash bond or not. Today, he is in custody for the attempted murder charge though he could at any moment get bonded out for \$1,375,000. The New London court is working on an agreement for a sentence of 3 years for all the charges combined and a lifetime protective order for Sara and myself.

In summary, Stiggle was bonded out 3 times in 2010 alone. All without putting up any collateral. We continue to fear for our safety and based on the evidence, we feel that when he gets out again he will follow through on his threats. I do not want to be a mother of a murdered child. We have been devastated both physically, emotionally and financially from this man. Please do not let this happen again. I beg of you to please change the law to better protect us and others from this violent offender.

Thank you so much again for the opportunity to testify today.