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**Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Before the Appropriations Committee
Wednesday, February 15, 2012**

Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the Governor's proposed budget adjustments.

The proposed budget adjustments include a reduction to the Office of the Victim Advocate's (OVA) operating expense account of over 12,000, or, nearly half of the over all Operating Expense budget.

Since 2007, the OVA's operating expenses budget has been slashed from 50,000 to the current 22,000. The proposed budget reduction will impact the daily function of the OVA's work and also eliminate the ability of the OVA from Co-Sponsoring the Melanie Ilene Rieger Conference.

The daily work of the OVA impacts individuals whose lives have been impacted by crime. The OVA is the agency where a crime victim can turn to when the Criminal Justice System fails them. For those who have not been directly impacted by crime, there is a fiction that the criminal justice system will respond in their time of need. The expectation is that appropriate warrants will be signed, the appropriate charges will be sought, the needed safety mechanisms will be provided and the case against the offender who has impact their life through crime, will be prosecuted. When the system does not produce these results, the OVA is there to assist. In the past twelve months, for instance, the OVA has assisted crime victims in becoming certified through our state's witness protection program, assisted in ensuring victim compensation was provided for a victim of sexual assault, ensured that available safety measures (shelter, and work place precautions) were provided for a crime victim, assisted a victim of domestic violence with service of a restraining order in NY, fought for the appropriate charges sought by the state's attorney, and ensured the crime victim could be present during the murder trial in a triple homicide. These are just a hand full of cases the OVA has worked on in the past twelve months. The OVA worked with the Speaker's Task Force on Domestic Violence to bring model policies for law enforcements' response to domestic violence. This recommendation was born from the OVA's Investigative Report of the Murder of Tiana Notice, whose death was three years ago yesterday.

This June the OVA is excited to be able to bring the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System's trainer to CT to instruct our Officers on the National NamUS database which connects the Missing of CT to other states for identification purposes. At last check from NCIC there are over 500 Missing Persons in CT.

The OVA's work is integral to our state's having Justice for all. Although the OVA often works quietly behind the scenes, the work we do daily impacts the 170K crime victims daily.

I would ask that the Appropriations Committee reject the proposed budget reductions to the OVA. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony this morning.