



**Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.**

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
In Support of Sec. 28 of HB 5365, An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services**

**Anna Doroghazi, Director of Public Policy and Communication  
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing, March 9, 2012**

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Anna Doroghazi, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Communication for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the association of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally-competent sexual assault victim services. We would like to offer our support for the changes to victim compensation outlined in Section 28 of HB 5365, *An Act Concerning Court Operations and Victim Services*.

HB 5365 makes changes to C.G.S. § 54-209 that would remove a barrier for sexual assault victims who need access to victim compensation. These changes take into consideration the unique challenges associated with reporting a sexual assault to law enforcement, and they give the Office of Victim Services more authority to order compensation payments for credible claims.

In most circumstances, crime victims are not eligible for compensation unless they report their victimization to law enforcement within five days of the crime occurring. Existing Connecticut law [C.G.S. § 54-211(a)(1)(C)] makes an exception for sexual assault victims, who can be considered eligible for compensation if they have a forensic evidence collection kit completed within 72 hours of their assault. This provision has greatly benefited sexual assault survivors who may be reticent to file a police report, but it does not help victims who are too traumatized, ashamed, or fearful to seek medical attention immediately after an assault. Following a sexual assault, it is not uncommon for victims to delay disclosure for weeks, months, or even years. When they do decide to disclose the fact of their victimization, they may reach out to a sexual assault counselor, healthcare provider, or mental health professional – none of whom are currently able to validate a victim's claim and help them gain access to compensation.

Regardless of whether or not a sexual assault victim makes a police report or has forensic evidence collected, the physical and emotional aftereffects of victimization can last for years and require intensive medical and psychological intervention. The expenses associated with sexual victimization can be considerable, and victim compensation is critical for survivors who might not otherwise have the financial resources needed to receive assistance.

HB 5365 would make it possible for the Office of Victim Services to approve compensation for sexual assault victims who have disclosed their victimization to specified healthcare providers, psychologists, police officers, mental health professionals, emergency medical services providers, alcohol and drug counselors, marital and family therapists, sexual assault or battered women's counselors, professional counselors, clinical social workers, or an employee of the Department of Children and Families. This change to § 54-209 would benefit sexual assault survivors in two key ways: 1) it would make it possible for survivors to become eligible for compensation if they seek assistance from a range of service providers, and 2) it would give the Office of Victim Services increased authority to order compensation for sexual assault victims if the Office or a compensation commissioner can reasonably conclude that an assault has occurred.

Access to compensation is critical for victims of sexual violence who have incurred expenses as a result of their assault. HB 5365 acknowledges the unique obstacles that sexual assault survivors face in reporting their victimization, and it gives the Office of Victim Services more discretion in determining eligibility for compensation.

CONNSACS supports the changes that this bill would make to C.G.S. § 54-209, and we encourage the Committee to do the same.

Thank you for your consideration.

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