

**Written Testimony for the Record Submitted by  
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**Submitted to the  
Joint Committee on Judiciary**

**Hearing on  
H.B. No. 5510 (RAISED) AN ACT PROVIDING NOTICE OF PENDING FAMILY  
RELATIONS MATTERS TO JUDGES IN FAMILY VIOLENCE CASES  
and  
HB No. 5548 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**Hearing Held March 23, 2012  
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Co-Chairman Coleman, Co-Chairman Fox and Members of the Committee,

I am pleased to have the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) on Bill #5510: An Act Providing Notice of Pending Family Relations Matters to Judges in Family Violence Cases and on Bill #5548, An Act Concerning Domestic Violence.

I commend you, Co-Chairmen Coleman and Fox and the entire Committee for holding this important hearing, which provides a useful forum to examine the need for additional protections for victims of domestic violence in the state of Connecticut and the need for updated definitions for stalking which will bring Connecticut up to speed with the rest of the nation.

I work as the Director of Policy for CCADV, the leading voice of domestic violence victims across the state, and the statewide representative of its 18 member organizations, who work to provide counseling, support services and safe accommodations for victims and their children. We at CCADV work tirelessly to change social conditions through advocacy, public awareness, technical assistance and education.

First, if HB5510 is passed, it will provide for increased collaboration on domestic violence issues between different sectors of the Judicial Branch by requiring that judges in criminal family violence cases be given a report indicating whether the same parties are also involved in a family relations dispute. This information would be extremely valuable to family violence judges who need to take victim safety into account when issuing orders and handing down sentences.

When the status of a relationship changes as a result of legal action - such as divorce proceedings, child custody disputes and civil restraining order applications - the victim is in a significantly elevated amount of danger from the abuser. By having access to this information regarding the status of concurrent family relations cases, judges in family violence cases will be able to make decisions that will keep victims and their minor children safer.

Secondly, with regard to HB5548, Connecticut's stalking statutes need to be updated to include a wider range of offender behaviors. Currently, the crime of stalking is limited to offenders who repeatedly follow or lie in wait for their victims, but we know that stalkers use a much wider range of behaviors and means to track, intimidate, and frighten their victims. They may send flowers one day, leave voicemails the next day, and physically follow the victim the following day. Stalkers should be held accountable for their entire course of conduct, however varied it may be. Connecticut's stalking statutes are not currently flexible enough to cover new technologies - such as GPS, cell phones and the Internet - that offenders use to stalk their victims.

Section 2 of HB5548 would add "stalking or a pattern of threatening" to the definitions for family violence, which makes perfect sense, as the two often go hand in hand. In addition, Section 11, as drafted, would now provide that a person who has been previously convicted of stalking in the third degree can have a subsequent second degree stalking charge elevated to the offense of stalking in the first degree. While this is an improvement, the Committee should consider alternative language during the amendment process that eliminates stalking-third and refocuses the stalking-second language on a course of conduct by the offender which causes the victim to fear for his/her physical safety or employment security. This language has already been drafted by CONNSACS and stalking victims would benefit greatly from its adoption. The "course of conduct" approach is currently used by 44 other states - Connecticut should ameliorate its position as one of the stragglers.

CCADV stands ready to support HB5510, and HB5548 with the suggested amendments, as well as any other legislative measures that can improve safety and services for victims of domestic violence. We invite the Committee to reach out to CCADV for expertise on all legislation that potentially impacts the rights of these victims and look forward to a close working relationship in the future.