

**Testimony of Karen Gaston**

**Submitted to the Joint Committee on Judiciary**

**Hearing on**

**R.B. No. 5548: AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**March 23, 2012**

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Karen Gaston. I am here today to speak on Raised Bill 5548: An Act Concerning Domestic Violence. Last year, as a survivor of domestic violence, I was given the opportunity to sit on the Law Enforcement Response to Family Violence Task Force, an appointment I found to be very rewarding.

I wasn't always the proud and confident woman I am now. I experienced abuse at the hands of my now ex-husband, but it didn't start out that way. Like many survivors of domestic violence, I was courted for years before I got married. Those were the most wonderful times, I was treated like a princess and my life was everything it could be and more. I was lavished with gifts, trips and lots of love. I never realized what I was in store for. We married and shortly thereafter the abuse began. It started out with verbal abuse, name calling, putting me down and humiliating me. Eventually the abuse got worse, he started pushing and shoving me then he hit me. I called the police and then went to stay with my mother but only for the night. When I went back home the next day, he was there and the police came and arrested him. But that didn't stop the abuse- he continued to harass and stalk me. I had to change my phone number and over the course of months I called the police, he was arrested and the court issued a protective order for my safety. I was so shocked and afraid; I learned that the protective order meant nothing to him.

About 8 months later and with a full protective order in place, he came to my home to drop off my daughter from his visitation. An argument ensued, and he tried to strangle me. I ran inside to call the police and as I was speaking with dispatch, he broke down the door. Then he stabbed me in the back. At first I didn't even realize that I was hurt. It wasn't until I saw the blood that I knew I was seriously injured. I was rushed to the hospital where I stayed for a week in recovery. After I was stabbed he went into hiding and eventually he was picked up on the warrant. The abuse finally stopped when I started fighting back and didn't back down. However, he did continue to harass and try to control me by filing motion after motion in civil court.

What I told you is just a small glimpse into my life. I would like to say that was my former life but there are still days when I look over my back. Even time cannot erase those memories. Today I have dedicated my life to helping victims of domestic violence whose cases are heard in the Hartford court. When I speak with victims, I can see that some things have not changed. I have noticed that domestic violence is responded to differently in each police department. And sometimes differences exist even within one department. Just as I had experienced, there was no uniform response. I have also seen that there are far more violations of both restraining and protective orders with no arrest. And I think, perhaps my circumstances would have been different if my ex-husband was arrested for violating the protective order.

So today, I come before you to ask for your support of Raised Bill 5548. We must invest our time in the right approaches and in getting better outcomes for victim. And while I cannot change what happened to me, I do know that with your support, life can be different for other victims. Thank you for your time.