Written Testimony for the Record Submitted by
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On behalf of the
Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Submitted to the
Joint Committee on Judiciary

Hearing on
H.B. 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 #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.

I work as the Family Violence Victim Advocate Supervisor for the Women's Center of Southeastern Connecticut, one of the 18 member organizations represented by CCADV. As a Coalition, we work tirelessly to change social conditions through advocacy, public awareness, technical assistance and education.

Because of my standing within the community, I was given the honor of serving on the Task Force on Law Enforcement Response to Family Violence. This working group was made up of a broad array of stakeholders from around the state, including legislators, prosecutors, advocates, and law enforcement officials. We were assigned a dual mission; first, we were asked to evaluate existing policies and procedures used by law enforcement agencies when responding to incidents of family violence and violations of restraining and protective orders. Secondly, we were tasked with developing a state-wide law enforcement model policy for use by law enforcement agencies when responding to those incidents.

Based on our findings during the course of our work on the Task Force, we recommended that the following steps be taken in order to ensure that victims receive consistent treatment across the state, rather than being considered differently depending on where in Connecticut the incident takes place:

- Establish consistent procedures for the enforcement of protective orders.
- Develop procedures for "officer-involved" domestic violence cases.
- Establish procedures for a defendant's return to the residence to retrieve belongings.
- Define protocols for seizure of firearms and electronic defense weapons.

- Develop procedures related to interactions with victims and witnesses with questionable immigration status.
- Designate domestic violence liaisons within each police department.
- Clarify procedures for multiple jurisdiction responsibility coordination.
- Require 4 ½ hours of domestic violence training out of the 60 hours of mandatory continuing education for established officers.
- Define arrest procedures.
- Revise the DPS 230 form to include a section to document the reason for the dual arrest.

But above all, the Task Force recommended the establishment of a similarly diverse Family Violence Model Policy Governing Council, which would continuously evaluate police domestic violence policies and procedures, review and update the Model Policy to keep abreast of relevant Connecticut laws, and evaluate the accuracy of the data used to make domestic violence policy decisions. By passing this bill, the legislature will be putting into place for the foreseeable future an invaluable mechanism for improving the safety of domestic violence victims and the consistency of law enforcement response to domestic violence incidents.

Additionally, this bill is important for victim safety planning because it would allow the Judicial branch to disclose non-conviction information regarding domestic violence abusers to victim advocates. It is important to note that victims would not have access to this information, so the other party's privacy would not be placed in jeopardy. This provision would simply allow advocates to put together more effective safety plans for domestic violence victims and their minor children, by giving the advocates deeper insights into the individual's past police and court involvement.

A pattern of abuse is a significant lethality indicator and knowledge of prior police or court involvement is essential for court-based victim advocates to effectively perform the task that the state has contracted with them to provide. Where there is a history or pattern of violence, an advocate will push harder for the victim to engage in a more intensive safety planning process. In order to keep victims and their children safe from abusers whose past run-ins with the criminal justice system are currently hidden from view, the legislature needs to pass this bill.

CCADV stands ready to support HB5548 and any additional measures that help improve the protections and services offered to victims of domestic violence in the state of Connecticut. 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.