



Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

Laura Cordes, Executive Director

**Regarding HB 6350, AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2015, AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATING
TO REVENUE**

February 15, 2013

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee: my name is Laura Cordes, and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the coalition 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 ask for your continued support for those who are working every day with victims and survivors of rape and child sexual abuse, and their families, by maintaining funding for current service levels in the rape crisis line item in the Department of Public Health section of the Governor's proposed budget.

During our last fiscal year (FY 11-12), certified sexual assault victim advocates at CONNSACS and sexual assault crisis services programs provided 24/7 crisis counseling, advocacy services, and support to over 7,000 victims of sexual assault and their loved ones. Advocates at local sexual assault crisis services programs provide services at all hours of the day and night. When a rape victim goes to the hospital at 2am to be treated for injuries and have forensic evidence collected, our advocates are there. When a sexual assault survivor needs someone to talk to on a Sunday afternoon, victim advocates are available to take their call. Our advocates staff one of the nation's only statewide Spanish-language rape crisis hotlines; run support groups; provide individual and group counseling; participate in the Multi-Disciplinary Teams that review child abuse cases; undertake community awareness campaigns; and provide education and training to schools, law enforcement, service providers, and community members. Further, they provide all of these services free of charge and with no waiting list.

Funding sexual assault crisis services is an important investment in our communities. If sexual assault survivors did not have immediate, free access to our services, many would face insurmountable barriers to accessing assistance following an assault. Without advocate support, some survivors would not engage in the criminal justice system, resulting in offenders escaping justice and causing continued harm to the community. Some would need to access more expensive mental health services. Some would turn to substance abuse as a means of coping with their victimization. Some would be unable to return to work. These contingencies are not acceptable; they are unfair to survivors, and they take a heavy toll on the economic and social well-being of our communities.

- *(Your program) has unlocked doors for me that I thought could never be unlocked. The one-on-one counseling is what truly has worked for me to be able to discuss the traumas of my childhood and deal with them accordingly. It truly has been a blessing in my life.*
- *My advocate has helped me in many ways. Most importantly she has helped me to see that this is not my fault and I can get over this.*

Please continue to support those who are working every day with victims and survivors of rape and child sexual abuse by funding current service levels in the rape crisis line item in the Department of Public Health section of the Governor's proposed budget.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide you with any additional information about the importance of full funding for the rape crisis line item.

Thank you.

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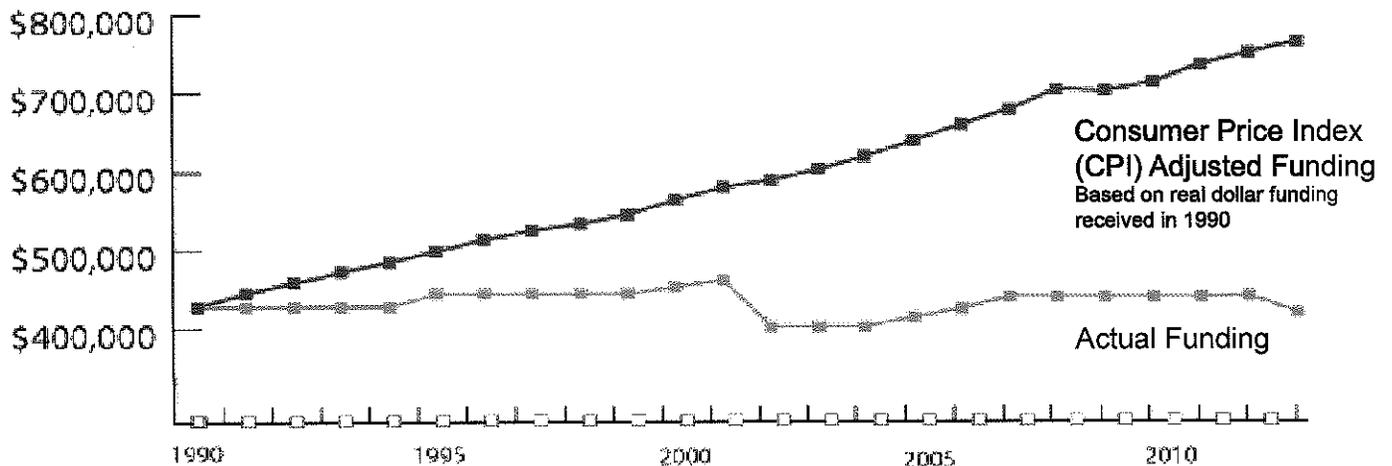
About Sexual Assault Crisis Services

Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS) is the coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. Advocates at CONNSACS and our member programs provide vital services to sexual assault victims/survivors and their loved ones, including crisis counseling, hospital and court accompaniment, and support groups. Important funding for these programs comes from the rape crisis line item in the state budget, and sexual assault crisis services are the only programs in Connecticut that specialize in both the counseling and advocacy needs of sexual assault survivors and their loved ones.

Funding Facts

- Last year, advocates at CONNSACS and our member programs provided services to over 7,000 survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones. Local sexual assault crisis services programs saw a 20% increase in services over the previous year.
- With the Governor's proposed budget cut, the rape crisis line item will decrease 4.5% to \$422,008. This is \$5,853 LESS than the nominal amount provided through the rape crisis line item in 1990.
- Rape crisis services would need to receive \$764,129 this year to match the real dollar amount (adjusted for inflation) of funding received in 1990.
- Last year, for the first time since its passage in 1994, Congress failed to reauthorize the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), the largest federal funding source for sexual assault crisis programs. While VAWA funding will continue for now, funding uncertainty on the federal level makes state funding crucial.
- Sexual assault crisis services programs are already understaffed and seeing more clients than ever. Any additional funding cuts will likely result in fewer services and fewer advocates to serve sexual assault victims and their loved ones.

State Funding for Rape Crisis Programs (FY 1990 - FY 2013)



How does state funding support sexual assault victims/survivors?

The rape crisis line item of the state budget supports the programs and services provided at CONNSACS' nine local sexual assault crisis services programs. Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS) is the coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. Advocates at these nine programs provide free and confidential services to victims/survivors all hours of the day, every day of the year.

These services include:

- 24/7 Hotline Services in English and Spanish
- Crisis counseling
- Hospital accompaniment
- Police and court accompaniment
- Advocacy for children and non-abusing parents
- Short-term counseling
- Support groups
- Community education programs

Impact of Services

In client feedback surveys from our last two fiscal years, over 95% of respondents said that the services they received at sexual assault crisis services programs met or exceeded their expectations. 97% of clients agree or very much agree that their counselor/advocate helped them to understand and manage their feelings, and 97% said their counselor/advocate helped them understand the effects of trauma and provided information about available resources, options, and additional services.

In the words of one rape survivor who had an advocate accompany her to the hospital for forensic evidence collection: ***"I would not have made it through this experience without (my advocate). I am very grateful that SACS was introduced to me."***

Sexual Assault Crisis Services Programs in Connecticut

Trained and certified sexual assault crisis services counselors/advocates provide services to every town and city in Connecticut. All services are provided to victims/survivors free of charge.

