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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 19, 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. During our last fiscal year, sexual assault victim advocates at CONNSACS and our member programs provided services to over 7,000 survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones. Over 85% of these survivors were women. Because sexual violence – and other pressing issues such as domestic abuse, income inequality, and access to reproductive healthcare – disproportionately impact women, we would like to voice our support for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. The Governor's plan to merge the PCSW with other commissions would result in less specialized, targeted advocacy on behalf of women at the legislature; CONNSACS opposes this plan and asks that the PCSW be allowed to remain an independent voice for women at the Connecticut General Assembly.

One in eleven Connecticut women have been raped, and one in five have experienced some form of sexual violence. 80% of human trafficking victims are female, and one in six women in the United States have been victims of stalking. 40 to 60% of working women experience sexual harassment on the job. Over the years, PCSW has emerged as one of Connecticut's leading voices to end violence against women, curb harassment, and create a state that is safer for women and girls. They have spearheaded Connecticut's Trafficking in Persons Council, provided trainings on sexual harassment prevention for state agencies, and testified on dozens of bills related to violence against women. They have supported CONNSACS' legislative initiatives related to stalking, sexual assault against people with disabilities, sexual violence on college campuses, and emergency contraception.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is a good investment for the state. Their annual allotment of $504,394 represents a cost of approximately 35 cents for each of Connecticut's 1,435,664 women over the age of 18 – a bargain compared to the amount of money spent annually on violence against women. The National Institute of Justice (1994) estimates that rape costs $127 billion each year in the United States, an amount equal to approximately $800 per U.S. female. A more recent study (Dolezal, McCollum, and Callahan 2009) estimated that up to 37.5% of healthcare dollars in the U.S. are spent on violence and abuse.

The state of Connecticut cannot afford to ignore issues that disproportionately impact women and girls. For forty years, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women has been providing research, advocating for, and making a difference on issues that impact women in our state, including sexual violence. CONNSACS is proud to support PCSW, and we hope the committee will join us in advocating for their continued independence.

Thank you for your consideration.