

YWCA New Britain Sexual Assault Crisis Service
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Testimony of Heide Rivera, Bilingual Advocate for the Sexual Assault Crisis Service

IN SUPPORT OF HB 6702: AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT (Sec. 5)

Senator, Representative and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Heide Rivera, I am the Bilingual Advocate for the YWCA New Britain Sexual Assault Crisis Service (SACS). SACS provides free and confidential counseling services to victims of sexual assault and their loved ones (children, adults and the Latino community). I have worked at SACS for 7 years and have had the opportunity to work with victims of sexual assault from ages 6 to 72. Each year, I continue to empower this wonderfully diverse population.

As one of the Bilingual Advocates it is important for us to protect the confidentiality of our victims, survivors or loved ones in a situation such as HB 6702. Below is a story of one of my clients and the experience she had with different agencies. Various agencies continued to try and help my client break her lease, but in the end, no one was able to help keep her family safe and she currently lives in a shelter in another state.

I have had the opportunity to work with a mother of three children, all under the age of 15. Her first form of contact with SACS was through the 24 hour Spanish Hotline as she was experiencing an emotional shock, after a traumatic event. Her middle daughter was sexually assaulted by a 24 year old male who lived only a few blocks down from their apartment. This mother did everything she thought a mother needed to do to keep her family safe and help them heal. Her daughter was able to get an evidence collection kit done as well as file a police report. The perpetrator was arrested shortly after. However, he made bail the following day.

Their lives were now at the hands of the perpetrator. He attempted to break into their apartment almost immediately after his release. During all of this, my client also discovered this perpetrator was arrested in the past for various similar crimes including a case of rape in another Connecticut town. Feeling unsafe and helpless, my client tried to break her lease with Section Eight Housing. However, their policies and procedures required police documentation. My client made the decision to keep that information confidential in order to protect her daughter from any more harm. She tried to navigate within the system as best she could. She worked with the Department of Children and Families and a Court Victim Advocate, all who did their best to uphold the confidentiality of her daughter's story while advocating on her behalf. My client continuously felt helpless, unprotected and not understood.

My client needed to do what was in the best interest for her and her family, so she left all her belongings and currently lives in a shelter in another state.

As an advocate, I feel we should support our clients who have been sexually assaulted and work together to protect our clients in every way possible during these difficult situations. If we are not allowing victims to

break a lease without penalty, things are only going to get worse for them and their loved ones. It is extremely sad and frustrating that this mom tried to protect her daughter and her family, but was still not able to break her lease or move.

I am in full support of Section 5 of HB 6702 AN ACT CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT. I hope this helps the Committee see the importance of allowing victims to break a lease more accessible and for the Committee to join us in support of HB 6702. Thank you for your consideration.

Regards,

Heide Rivera
Bilingual Advocate
YWCA New Britain Sexual Assault Crisis Service