

Testimony

By

Kathy Matson

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Good morning Judiciary Committee and thank you for the opportunity to be here today and speak on such an important issue such as **House Bill 6702, An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**. I am here today to testify on Section: 4, which require the Chief Court Administrator to provide a secure conference room for victims of family violence crimes and advocates for victims of family violence crimes.

My name is Kathy Matson; I am a Family Violence Victim Advocate at Interval House, the largest of 18 domestic violence programs in the state of Ct. Interval House provides comprehensive domestic violence services to victim of domestic violence in Hartford as well as 23 other surrounding towns. Our domestic violence programs across the state of Connecticut have Family Violence Victim Advocates in the criminal courts where they provide much needed extensive and comprehensive advocacy services to victims of domestic violence, after the arrest of a family member and/or intimate partner. Interval House has Family Violence Victim Advocates in the Hartford and Manchester courts. I have been housed at the Manchester court for the past 25 years. Last year, in 2012, Interval House provided services to 900 victims in the Manchester court.

I am here today because we are in desperate need of a confidential space in the Manchester court, where we can interview victims. Perpetrators of domestic violence rarely take responsibility for their violent behavior, blaming the victim and retaliating when they reach out for help such as calling the police. Therefore, when a perpetrator gets arrested, the risk level of the victim can rise to the level of lethality. The perpetrator has to appear in court and given the opportunity, will try to intimidate the victim, hoping that she will be too afraid to participate in the court process which can hold him accountable for his behavior. It is extremely important that if a victim comes to court, she can feel safe and comfortable sharing information about her situation, without the possibility of the perpetrator finding out.

I have dealt with victims who have been sexually assaulted who have not agreed to talk to me because they were too ashamed to even talk about what happened. Imagine having that conversation in the lobby of a courthouse.

This has become a huge challenge for those of us advocates who do not have office space available. In the Manchester court for over fifteen years we have been forced to interview victims in the lobby and at times, even in the ladies room. In this situation victims might not feel comfortable telling us the whole situation, therefore, hindering our ability to get the information we need to provide them the best services possible. Please support this bill which will assist us to facilitate the confidentiality and privacy provisions afforded to victims in Connecticut General Statutes, VAWA & FVPSA

Confidentiality is essential to victims' ability to feel safe and at this time that has been jeopardized by the lack of office space. Although, we safety plan with every victim, it is still very difficult to feel safe when you're feeling so exposed. If victims of domestic violence do not feel safe inside a court house, where else can they feel safe?