

Testimony of April Smolski, LMFT

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HB 6641: An Act Concerning The Sexual Assault of Persons whose Ability to communicate lack of consent is substantially impaired

My name is April Smolski, I am a licensed Marital and Family Therapist as well as trained and certified Sexual assault victim advocate and counselor. I am a former Director of the New Britain and Hartford Sexual Assault Crisis Service and a state certified Sexual Assault Crisis Counselor/Advocate. I am writing in request for support of HB 6641: An act concerning the sexual assault of persons whose ability to communicate lack of consent is substantially impaired.

I have worked with the Sexual Assault Crisis Service in several capacities over the course of over 15 years. Statistics show that more than 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before the age of 18 years old. Some of the most vulnerable clients I have worked with have been children and adults with developmental disabilities. These disabilities are included and not limited to Autism, Asperger's syndrome, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy and other social communication and learning disorders as well as mental health related diagnosis. Connecticut Statistics show more than 90% of victims know their perpetrator. In over 90% of the cases I have provided treatment the perpetrator was a family friend, doctor, older sibling, or other person entrusted with the child or person's care.

I have provided therapy to victims with mental health and developmental diagnosis who have encountered fear of losing their home, fear of displacement to foster care, fear of losing their lives if they were to report this crime. I encourage you to imagine for a moment that you are a young child or adult with disabilities and someone has just told you that if you do not comply to their sexual act they will kill you, your parents, your pet...

Many victims are confused, unsure if what occurred is assault because someone has "convinced" them otherwise or they were threatened and scared. They attempt suicide, dissociate and are ultimately institutionalized or perpetuate the cycle because they were not given opportunity to have their voice heard. They are conscious however neurologically it is impossible for these victims to comprehend many of the aspects of what has just occurred or when it occurs frequently it causes tremendous confusion, guilt and fear/anxiety and greater mental health concerns.

This is an unspeakable crime, literally. Perpetrators, have one main goal: To ensure their victims remain silent; to ensure their victim believes that they are "crazy" and do not know what they are talking about. They may therefore develop dissociative identity disorder, depression and anxiety further complicating their delicate emotional, mental and behavioral health. In fact they depend on this and even blame the victim based on their disability. "What do they know they can't even....(fill in the blank)" "How can you believe what they say, they don't even know what (fill in the blank) means?"

A young woman with autism told me that when she told of her abuse no one believed her. She attempted suicide and withdrew from family and friends. It is all the more disturbing to me as a professional and one who cares deeply for individuals with mental health and developmental diagnosis to know that to this point the law is not stated to protect these individuals with neurological, developmental and mental health needs. If you would like to further discuss this with me I may be contacted at aprilny23@yahoo.com

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Regards,

April Smolski, LMFT