



Date: April 15, 2013

To: Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary
From: Andrea Mancuso, Esq.
Domestic Violence Crisis Center

Re: **Support for Raised Bill No. 6702 (AAC Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault), Sec. 1:
Economic Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence in Restraining Orders**

The Domestic Violence Crisis Center (DVCC) urges you to support the proposal outlined in Section 1 of Raised Bill No. 6702, which would provide economic protections for victims of domestic violence in Restraining Order proceedings. DVCC is the sole services provider for victims of domestic violence in the seven towns of Stamford, Norwalk, Darien, New Canaan, Weston, Wilton, and Westport. Our staff works with over 3,400 victims of domestic violence each year. We have two attorneys on our staff who practice within the Family Court, providing advice, assistance and representation to victims seeking to obtain restraining orders. The economic protections proposed in Section 1 would have a substantially positive impact on our ability to help victims safely and successfully navigate leaving abusive relationships.

Our experience working with victims has demonstrated time and again that economic survival is critical to the ability to safely extricate a victim and her children from an abusive relationship. In fact, independent studies have shown that access to economic resources is the best predictor of whether or not a victim will permanently separate from her abuser. Under current Connecticut law, many victims find themselves forced to make a choice between staying in an abusive relationship or leaving and facing extreme poverty and homelessness. DVCC works with victims every day who, given no other considerations, would go forward with filing for an order which removes the abuser from the home and restricts all contact in an effort to secure their physical safety. However, 98% of all abusive relationships involve financial abuse, and victims understand quite clearly the harsh reality that one of the most commonly used retaliation tactics is for the abuser to cause financial distress. As a result, victims are staying in abusive relationships when they would otherwise leave.

Recognizing the pervasive use of economic coercion, at least 37 other states have created similar provisions in their restraining order statutes – allowing a victim to obtain a time limited order of support as part of the restraining order process. Several well respected national bodies support this type of law, including the Battered Women’s Justice Project and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. This immediate financial protection could mean the difference between staying and leaving for so many victims every year.

The days following a victim’s decision to leave are often the most difficult. The victim is contending not only with the emotional trauma of ending the abusive relationship, but also with ensuring she has structured a viable safety net for herself and her children. The goal of a restraining order is to assist a victim in securing that safety net. Safety is undeniably dependent



on economic survival. Referring a victim to another pr process outside of the RO causes unnecessary delay and fails to meet immediate safety needs. Seeking orders of support through the family court often takes weeks if not months, even for *pendente lite* orders, particularly for low income, pro se individuals unfamiliar with navigating the complex family court system.

The ability to obtain economic relief during the restraining order process provides a victim with breathing room to keep her and her children safe while she gets those more long term petitions started. **Connecticut's restraining order process can and should provide this level of protection.**