

Written Testimony

In Support of HB 6702, AAC Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault

Melanie Smith, MSW Candidate, UConn School of Social Work
Judiciary Committee
April 15, 2013

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Committee:

My name is Melanie Smith and I am a Master's degree candidate at the University of Connecticut, School of Social Work. I am here today to testify in support of raised H.B. 6702, specifically regarding the addition of economic protections as part of civil restraining orders (RO).

As a social work student concentrating in the area of policy, I have focused my studies on issues related to women and children. Domestic violence (DV) is an issue that I have personal and professional experience with; I am a survivor of teen dating violence and I have worked with DV offenders, victims, and children exposed to DV for the past five years. Currently, I am a Domestic Violence Consultant for the Department of Children and Families (DCF) in Hartford and I am an intern at the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV).

Without financial protections being part of a RO, victims are vulnerable to further manipulations by an offender. In my position at DCF, I interviewed a mother who described her experience with the implications of obtaining a RO under Connecticut's current RO statute (CT General Statute 46b-15). This mother was granted a RO; whereby, the offender was ordered out of the home. He was the only source of income for the family, and presenting as an act of kindness, he was *nice enough* to continue to help support her financially. However, in order to get the money, he forced her to meet him in person on a weekly basis, allowing him to gain access to her and preventing her from calling the police to report a violation of the RO. He was able to continue to control her and manipulate the situation to his advantage, by constantly reminding her that he 'was doing this out of the *goodness of his heart*, and *proving that he still loves and cares for her*, despite the fact that *she forced him* out of the home'. When he was abusive to her during these weekly meetings, he would remind her that he would stop giving her money if she reported him to the police.

By providing temporary but immediate relief to victims through Connecticut's civil RO process, victims will have access to resources that can help keep them safe and keep them away from their abuser.¹

OVER

Research on the principles of *Exchange Theory* in relation to DV found that, *the decision to return to an abusive relationship is guided by a rewards-cost ratio, whereby rewards inside the relationship are perceived to be higher than costs outside the relationship.*² Oftentimes, the risk of losing financial supports is far greater and detrimental to the victim and her children than the benefits of a RO. Knowing that economic protections can be included in a civil RO, may be the deciding factor and motivator for a woman to pursue a RO. It won't change the feelings of fear or anxiety around the process, but it could make the process worth it.

Offenders choose to use abusive and controlling behaviors, and should be held accountable for their actions. It is time to stop re-victimizing the victim. We, as a society, shouldn't worry about how an offender is going to find another place to stay while still paying rent/mortgage for a home he can no longer go to. Offenders put themselves in that position; victims don't choose to put them there. The more protections we can provide to victims, the more likely they will be to access services, and the more likely they will be to become survivors.

I would like to acknowledge that Connecticut has done a lot of hard work over the past few years to strengthen our laws to help protect victims of DV and hold offenders accountable. I urge you to continue these efforts. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 6702. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Melanie Smith
MSW Candidate
UConn School of Social Work
860.916.3163
Melaniemarie.smith@gmail.com

¹ Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence Policy Brief (2013, March). Financial abuse: Securing economic protections for victims of domestic violence. Retrieved April 9, 2013 from <http://www.ctcadv.org>

² Roberts, C.J., Wolfer, L., & Mele, M. (2008, February 20). Why victims of intimate partner violence withdraw protection orders. *Journal of Family Violence*, 23: 369-375. doi:10.1007/s10896-008-9161-z