



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Testimony in Support of

SB 282, AAC the Inclusion of Teen Dating Violence Education in the Public School Curriculum

Education Committee

March 3, 2014

Member Organizations

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services
Ansonia, CT

The Center for Family Justice
Bridgeport, CT

Women's Center
Danbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program United Services
Dayville, CT

Network Against Domestic Abuse
Enfield, CT

Domestic Abuse Services Greenwich YWCA
Greenwich, CT

Interval House
Hartford, CT

Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis
Meriden, CT

New Horizons
Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center
New Britain, CT

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services
New Haven, CT

Safe Futures
New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services
Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project
Torrington, CT

Safe Haven
Waterbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program United Services
Willimantic, CT

Good morning Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those agencies that serve them. Our members provide essential services to over 56,000 victims of domestic violence, which includes victims of teen dating violence. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We urge your support of SB 282.

According to the 2011 Connecticut School Health Survey Youth Behavior Component Report, which is administered by the CT Department of Public Health, 16.7% of Connecticut students reported that they were emotionally abused by a boyfriend or girlfriend (e.g., called names, made fun of in front of others, ridiculed about their body or looks or told they were worthless). Additionally, 8.2% of high school students were hit, slapped, or physically hurt on purpose by a boyfriend or girlfriend. Nationwide, nearly 1.5 million high school students experience physical abuse from a dating partner in a single year.

Last year, CCADV released Connecticut's first-ever statewide plan for the prevention of intimate partner violence. *From Planning to Practice – Preventing Intimate Partner Violence in Connecticut* is the result of an intensive, two-year planning process by a multi-disciplinary group of experienced domestic violence and prevention practitioners. This strategic initiative calls for increasing healthy relationship content in schools and doing so with a standard, evidence-based curriculum across the state.

Preventing abuse and violence in relationships requires true social change. Teaching teens about dating violence and what a healthy relationship looks like is key to making that change. Every day teens and youth are exposed to the abusive relationships that are glorified in the media and many are also exposed to the abusive relationships in their own homes. If we don't provide examples of alternative, healthy behaviors, than we can't possibly expect the rates of teen dating violence and, later in life, abuse between adult partners, to diminish.

Using the classroom to provide this learning opportunity makes sense. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, at least 19 states have laws that urge or require school boards to develop curricula on teen dating violence. This includes Massachusetts which requires (1) school districts to implement policies that clearly state that teen dating violence will not be tolerated and develop guidelines for addressing incidents of teen dating violence (MGL 71 § 2C) and (2) the inclusion in health education of information on safe and healthy relationships with a focus on preventing sexual and domestic violence (MGL 71 § 1).

While some might say that requiring teen dating violence education is just another unfunded mandate on schools, the time has certainly come for serious consideration

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of where teen dating violence education falls in the list of priorities. Over the past ten years, Connecticut has averaged 14 homicides annually stemming from intimate partner violence. The abusive behavior that leads to such homicides is learned at some point, but it can absolutely be countered with education about healthy relationships. But this will only be accomplished if the time and funding is prioritized.

Again, we urge your support of this bill and any resources necessary to implement it. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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