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Testimony of Garvin G. Ambrose, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Higher Education and Employee Advancement Committee
Tuesday, February 11, 2014

Good day Senator Cassano, Representative Willis, and distinguished members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Garvin Ambrose and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

Raised House Bill No. 5029, *An Act Concerning Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence on Campus*

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) **supports** the General Assembly's efforts to improve the response and services to victims of sexual assault and intimate partner violence on college campuses with the provisions of Raised House Bill No. 5029. The OVA shares a mutual interest with other service providers and institutions of higher education in providing appropriate and quality support and services for victims, ensuring accountability for perpetrators, and affording meaningful awareness and education for administrators, local law enforcement, and students.

Raised House Bill No. 5029 serves these interests by requiring institutions of higher education to: (1) Disclose policies and procedures related to the reporting of sexual assault and intimate partner violence; (2) Promote education and awareness programs related to such assaults and violence; (3) Notify victims of their rights and options; and (4) Require each institution of higher education to establish and train a sexual assault response team to ensure a coordinated response to reported incidences of sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

Moreover, Section 2 of Raised House Bill No. 5029 encourages compliance with the provisions of this proposal by requiring each institution of higher education to submit an annual report to the General Assembly containing detailed information regarding the policies adopted by the institution, the information provided to victims, the efforts to bring awareness and education at the institution

and an accounting of the number of incidents, reported or otherwise, including the manner in which the incidents were resolved.

In addition to the above requirements, the OVA believes that the proposal should be further amended in three specific ways. Primarily, in an effort to be consistent with existing statutory language, **the OVA recommends that Section 2, Line 48 of the proposal be amended to delete the term “domestic violence” and replace it with “family violence,”** as defined by C.G.S. § 46b-38a, rather than C.G.S. § 46b-38h. This clarification would ensure that students who have been threatened, harmed, or assaulted by a roommate or other household member would have access to the same level of services and relief as outlined in today’s proposal.

Secondly, the OVA recommends the expansion of Subsection (b) of Section 3, which describes the composition and training of campus sexual assault response teams. In its 2012 Findings and Recommendation Report, the Connecticut Domestic Violence Fatality Review Committee found that an appropriate cultural and linguistic response to victims was crucial to ensuring that victims had meaningful access to help. Therefore, **the OVA recommends that each sexual assault response team be trained to respond to victims of diverse cultural backgrounds, including those with limited English proficiency.** Additionally, Subdivision (4) of Subsection (b) requires training in “victim-centered response,” which has not been defined in this proposal. In an effort to ensure the intended purpose is met, the OVA, in collaboration with the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV), offer the following definition:

“Victim-centered approach means the systematic focus on the needs and concerns of a victim of sexual assault or intimate partner violence that (A) ensures the compassionate and sensitive delivery of services in a nonjudgmental manner; (B) ensures an understanding of how victim trauma affects victim behavior; (C) maintains victim safety, privacy and confidentiality; and (D) recognizes that victims are never responsible for the crimes committed against them and that offenders are always responsible for their crimes.”

Finally, although the proposal is inclusive of the crime of stalking, it qualifies stalking only within the context of intimate partner violence, and not as a standalone crime. A 2009 Report by the Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that only twenty-two percent of stalking is perpetrated by a former intimate partner. Education, awareness, and services specific to stalking are critical on college campuses, particularly with rising incidents of cyber-stalking through cellular devices and over social media platforms. Therefore, **the OVA recommends that the proposal be further amended to include stalking as a standalone, in addition to intimate partner violence and sexual assault.**

The OVA would like to formally endorse the recommendations of CCADV, as provided in written testimony submitted to the Committee for today’s hearing, as

the changes they propose are necessary to ensure that victims of intimate partner violence receive the services and resources suitable for intimate partner violence.

Additionally, the OVA formally supports and encourages the Committee's adoption of the recommendations of the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS), as provided in written testimony to the Committee. Such recommendations to include training to law enforcement and Title IX Coordinators as well as prevention and awareness programming to varsity athletes, fraternities and sororities will assist in embracing a violence-free campus culture. **The OVA also recommends that, as part of the orientation for all incoming freshman, a portion of the program includes sexual assault, stalking and intimate partner violence prevention and awareness.**

Recognizing the serious threat that intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and stalking pose to the State's college students, the OVA stands ready to assist in the advancement of this proposal, **with the suggested amendments of the OVA, CCADV and CONNSACS**, and to ensure that quality services are available and accessible on every college campus.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Garvin G. Ambrose". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Garvin G. Ambrose, Esq.
State Victim Advocate