

Judiciary Committee
March 31, 2014
HB 5593 An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Anonymous Submission

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am a victim of Domestic Violence who has been struggling for years in the Family Courts to maintain custody of my child. I am submitting my testimony anonymously. There are many other women like me who would like to come forward publicly, but are afraid to do so. This is complicated by the fact that many women victims of Domestic Violence lack the internal resources to be organized to have their voices heard.

I would agree with others who submitted written testimony indicating that Domestic Violence Victim Advocates are direly needed in the Civil Family Courts. Women victims of domestic violence have no advocates in the civil family court system. They are told by their attorneys to not mention Domestic Violence or risk losing their children. This is due to the fact that women victims of domestic violence loose custody to their abusers an alarming 70% of the times according to statistics gathered by the American Bar Association. The statistics also show that up to 50% of high conflict custody cases involve domestic violence. The courts have actually become the last battleground whereby abusers can attempt exert control over their victim by depleting them of economic resources, and taking their children. This is a national crisis which has been addressed by the legislature of other states. CT still lags behind.

Other states have completed bias studies by Supreme Judicial Court Tasks Forces revealing gender bias against women victims of Domestic Violence in Civil Family Courts. Measures including new laws to protect women victims have been implemented.

While I think HB 5593 is a small step in the right direction, more needs to be done. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence addresses issues surrounding an domestic violence and child protection in custody disputes, however, our local Connecticut chapter has not.

Education needs to include Domestic Violence dynamics of abusers in custody battles directed not only to judges and court personnel, but also custody evaluators. See Child Custody Evaluators' Beliefs About Domestic Abuse Allegations, U.S. Department of Justice Study, Daniel G. Saunders, Ph.D., October 31, 2011. Much more work needs to be done in the area of Family Court Reform to protect Women Victims of Domestic Violence.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important bill. I hope that you will vote in favor of HB 5593.