

## HB 5593

### An Act Concerning Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

I have been an advocate for the Center for Family Justice (Bridgeport) for six years and a supervisor of court advocacy for over three years. As someone who works in the field on a daily basis I am confident that my experience will give the committee insight on restraining orders and the need to expand the protection to victims of both domestic and sexual assault.

Section one of the bill is in regards to financial relief as part of a restraining order. Currently, 36 other states provide spousal and/or child support as part of their restraining order process. Connecticut currently does not provide either leaving victims of domestic violence exposed to continued financial abuse from the perpetrator. Over 98% of domestic violence relationships involve financial abuse and allowing applicants of restraining orders to apply for financial relief provides them a stronger ability to be self-sufficient of their abuser and thus safer from further abuse.

Section three of the bill is in regards to service of restraining orders. Establishing a task force to study service of restraining orders will offer crucial information on the lack of service for restraining orders. Time and time again clients that we assist with the restraining order application will be granted an ex parte order only to find out on the day of the hearing that the order was never served. This not only puts them in harm's way (as the order is not in effect until it is served) but it means that they have to go through the entire application process again. This leaves victims exposed to continued abuse and the ongoing confusing court process.

Sections 21-22 and 24-26 of the bill are in concern to victims of sexual assault being allowed to apply for restraining orders. Currently in Connecticut only victims of domestic violence are applicable for restraining orders. Expanding the restraining order statute under this bill would allow victims of sexual assault to also be able to apply for civil restraining orders. There are many times when a perpetrator of sexual assault is not arrested right away and this leaves the victim vulnerable for further harassment from him/her. Children victims of sexual assault who are victimized by coaches, parents' partners, and anyone else who they are not related to are not eligible for restraining orders. Our agency conducts the Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) investigation for children of sexual assault and there have been many occasions that while the investigation is pending the child and their family continue to be at risk because they are unable under the current statute to apply for a restraining order. One particular case involved a family that lived in the same community as the perpetrator of the sexual assault and because they were not related to him they were unable to apply for a restraining order while the police conducted the investigation on the case. They eventually had to move out of the area because the constant

reminder of the traumatic sexual assault was too much for the child and her mother. A restraining order could have allowed them to live in peace from the perpetrator while the investigation was pending.

Section 32 of the bill establishes a pilot program for family violence victim advocates in the state's family courts to assist victims with restraining orders. As one of two programs who currently have a civil court advocate, we support this initiative wholeheartedly. Victims applying for restraining orders need specialized assistance not only in the application but also in safety planning, referrals to resources, and support in the hearing process which civil court advocates can provide.

I thank the committee for their time and effort on this bill and remain available to answer any specific questions.

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