



Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services
HB 5593, AAC Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Laura Cordes, Executive Director
Judiciary Committee, March 31, 2014

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Laura Cordes and I am the Executive Director Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally-competent sexual assault victim services.

During our last fiscal year, certified sexual assault victim advocates provided hospital, police and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information and referrals to over 7,000 victims and survivors of sexual violence throughout the state.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you in support of HB 5593, *AAC Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault* and the sections that represent the recommendations of the legislative task force, The Task Force on the Expansion of Civil Restraining Orders, which was established last year as a result of *Public Act 13-214*.

This task force was formed to study the feasibility of expanding access to civil restraining orders for all sexual assault victims regardless of the relationship to the offender. A report to the Legislature was completed in February of this year. I served on the task force along with Ivonne Zucco, Executive Director of The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education, one of CONNSACS' nine member centers. We were happy to be a part of this process and appreciate the work of our fellow task force members along with the Judicial Branch staff who took the time to carefully consider the safety needs of sexual assault victims.

We support the recommendations found in the task force report and reflected in HB 5593 to create civil protective orders process for persons who have been victims of sexual assault or stalking who do not have the protection of a civil restraining order or criminal protective order.

Sexual assault is a devastating crime that robs victims of their autonomy, control and trust. For many victims in the aftermath of an assault, a civil restraining order can offer a sense of safety and security.

Unfortunately under current law, far too many sexual assault victims can not access this protection. In order to be eligible to apply for a restraining order under 46b-15 the respondent must be a family or household member or current or former partner. While it is the case that more often than not most sexual assault victims are assaulted by someone known to them, the

offenders are not necessarily related by blood, living under the same roof or an intimate partner. Perpetrators are more likely to be a known neighbor, colleague, classmate, or family friend who targets the victim and uses their familiarity to gain access and then coerce, manipulate and assault them.

Often an offender remains in a survivor's social network or in their community following a sexual assault and can remain a threat to the victim. Victims of sexual assault feel particularly vulnerable immediately following an assault and after they report to the police. With an arrest, victims can anticipate a protective order, but investigations can be lengthy and arrest rates remain low.

Civil protective orders can help to protect victims during an investigation or longer if an arrest is never made. For some victims it may be the protection they need to feel secure enough to report the crime to the police.

CONNSACS member programs meet with survivors of sexual assault each month who are interested in seeking a civil protective order, but are ineligible because of their relationship to the perpetrator. There are also times where a survivor has been told by a law enforcement officer that they should obtain a civil restraining order only to learn later that they are ineligible. This leaves victims frustrated and revictimized and without the protection they deserve.

Connecticut would not be the first state to provide civil restraining orders to sexual assault victims. Currently over seventeen states do, including our neighboring states of Massachusetts and Vermont.

All sexual assault victims regardless of their relationship to the respondent deserve access to the protection afforded by our current civil restraining order system. The proposed civil protection order system would address this need.

As the state continues to explore how restraining orders are served by State Marshals, CONNSACS supports section three of HB 5593, to create a task force to study the service of restraining orders.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to provide additional information or answer questions you may have.