



Testimony Regarding Raised Bill HB 5593, AAC Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault

Good Morning Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the committee. My name is Aviania Iliadis, and I am an Attorney Advocate with the Domestic Violence Crisis Center (DVCC), a member program of the CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV). The DVCC serves the communities of Stamford, Norwalk, Westport, New Canaan, Darien, Wilton, and Weston, and is the only domestic violence victim service provider in CT with attorneys on staff charged with providing representation to victims seeking civil restraining orders.

I urge you to **SUPPORT Raised Bill HB 5593, AAC Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault**

Section 1:

Economic abuse is present in 98% of all abusive relationships. It is one of the most pervasive tactics abusers use to keep their victims dependent on them – because it is incredibly effective. The inability to achieve economic independence is the number one reason it takes victims multiple attempts at leaving before they are able to leave for good. This applies equally to victims across the economic spectrum.

Approximately 30% of all victims that seek information about civil restraining orders through the DVCC ultimately determine: 1) not to pursue a qualifying application; 2) not to attend the hearing on their granted ex parte application; or 3) to seek early termination of a granted full term order due to the fact that economic relief is not currently provided for in our statutes. Their abuser either has retaliated (or the victim knows he will retaliate) by failing to pay the rent (leaving the victim in jeopardy of eviction or homeless), taking away the family car (often the victim's only means of transportation), removing the food from the home, etc. In these cases, the failure of the law to adequately provide for economic relief directly compromises safety, as they are forced to choose between their safety and economic survival.

Recognizing this, more than 35 other states provide for economic relief as part of the restraining order process. The relief outlined in HB 5593 represents a best practice that would substantially increase the likelihood that a victim will successfully escape an abusive relationship much earlier in the process. Victims will have access to resources that can help keep them safe and keep them away from their abuser. Furthermore, it will give them the time they need to begin the process of obtaining permanent orders of support through the available legal channels.

Section 3:

Difficulty with the current process to accomplish service on an offender is a significant barrier for victims attempting to obtain a protective order - particularly those victims who do not have the benefit of an attorney or an advocate. Problems cited often include:



state marshals not returning phone calls; state marshals refusing to make more than one attempt at service; and safety concerns communicated by the state marshal that a victim does manage to connect with.

The victim's ability to obtain a restraining order for a full year is dependent upon successful service. Victims who are unable to accomplish service are often forced to go through the process of re-filing their entire application. Understandably, many find this process daunting and discouraging and ultimately give up, which compromises their safety.

Research conducted by New Haven Legal Assistance and the Yale Restraining Order Project has revealed that Connecticut is the only state in the country that does not provide for service of restraining orders by law enforcement. The creation of a task force to study this issue, including examining best practices established by other states and providing thoughtful recommendations for legislative action, would be a highly desirable way to address what is often an insurmountable challenge for victims seeking assistance in securing their safety.

Section 33

Currently, approximately one third of all criminal cases in Connecticut courts are family violence cases. It is important that judges have comprehensive training on the dynamics of family violence, are able to recognize the impact that abuse and violence have on the family, and have the capability to identify and disregard misinformation and stereotypes about domestic violence victims. So many of the victims I am privileged to work with have communicated that they are hesitant to engage the criminal justice system because they are afraid they will be stereotyped, judged and/or blamed for what has happened to them. As a Family Violence Victim Advocate, I hear from my colleagues around the state how wonderful this judge is at responding to domestic violence and how awful this other judge is at responding. Victims hear this too, and it impacts their decision making on whether or not to come forward. It is essential that the response victims receive from our civil and criminal courts is consistent across the state. Creating a statewide atmosphere wherein all judges are knowledgeable and sensitive to the issues of domestic violence will only enhance their ability to provide the critical protections that victims seek in a manner which encourages victims to continue to engage with those systems designed to help them.

On behalf of the DVCC, I would like to thank you for considering the proposals outlined in HB 5593 and urge your support.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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