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State Victim Advocate

Testimony of Garvin G. Ambrose, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Monday, March 24, 2014

Good day Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Judiciary 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 Senate Bill No. 489, *An Act Concerning Unlawful Dissemination of an Intimate Image of Another Person.*

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) **supports** Raised Senate Bill No. 489. The proposal targets and criminalizes the arising problem of “revenge porn.” Revenge porn is the retaliatory dissemination of sexual or nude photos or videos, often of a former intimate partner, without his/her consent. States are only beginning to acknowledge and criminalize revenge porn. Presently, only California and New Jersey have laws prohibiting the dissemination of revenge porn, while a dozen state legislatures are considering bills to do the same. Today’s proposal, if adopted, would make Connecticut a leader in confronting this issue.

As you can imagine, revenge porn can have devastating effects upon victims. A 2013 article in *The Guardian* documented the experience of one victim, Annmarie Chiarni. After Annmarie, an English professor from Maryland, ended her relationship with her possessive and jealous boyfriend, he threatened to auction off nude photos of her on eBay. She pleaded with him to not go through with his threats and sought help from the police, who indicated that there was nothing they could do to help her. Her ex-boyfriend began an eBay auction for the photos and promoted the auction over Facebook. The photos were viewed by the victim’s family, friends, colleagues, and students.

Over the following months, the victim exhaustively worked to remove images of herself from social network sites, but she was eventually notified that the images had been posted on a pornography website. She continued to seek help from law enforcement, but they were unable to intervene, as there were no laws prohibiting revenge porn in Maryland. The victim ultimately suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder and attempted suicide because of the distress caused by the distribution of these images.

Unfortunately, this phenomenon is also prevalent in Connecticut, where there are several of these cases now being prosecuted under statutes not tailored to address revenge porn. But this proposal would change that for future victims. If this proposal is adopted, victims, law enforcement, and prosecutors alike will not have to rake through Connecticut's criminal code attempting to find and stretch a provision that *may* fit the crime. Additionally, the criminalization of revenge porn will enable victims to recover restitution for financial losses associated with the crime. For instance, pornography sites that post revenge porn often charge the victim for the removal of his/her images. Victims need a means for prosecution and financial recovery. This proposal provides the necessary means.

Moreover, this proposal empowers law enforcement to take swift action upon a report of distribution of revenge porn, as there will be identifiable legal grounds for their intervention. This will ensure that victims like Annmarie will not be turned away by law enforcement, left vulnerable for continuing victimization, and ultimately denied justice.

For the forgoing reasons, the OVA **supports Raised Senate Bill No. 489**. Thank you again for your consideration of my testimony.

With gratitude,

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