

Testimony in Support of Raised Bill No. 203, LCO No. 1182

“An Act Concerning a State-Wide Sexual Abuse and Assault Awareness Program”

Committee on Children

27 February 2014

Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Urban and members of the Committee on Children. Thank you for your time in hearing my testimony. I extend my support to Raised Bill No. 203.

My name is Maria Jordan, a first year, UConn MSW candidate in the Policy Practice Discipline. I am also a trained Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Sandy Hook Survivor crisis hotline volunteer at a local, non-profit, domestic violence agency in Fairfield County.

Many of the adult client's that call into the crisis hotline and that I counsel are childhood survivors of sexual assault and abuse. In many of these calls, (the childhood sexual assault and abuse occurred over 20, 30 or 40 years ago). Due to stigmatization and a general lack of discourse, education and training on this subject, these “then-child” victims have fallen through the cracks of society. There was no safety net, system nor collaborative efforts in which to empower these “then-children” to disclose, report, or to receive treatment for (physical and/or mental health issues). And, worst of all, these client/victims of childhood sexual assault and abuse are still emotionally shattered and in pain. In coping with the unresolved damage caused by child sexual assault and abuse, the psychological effects of being the victim of such crimes are manifested well into adulthood.

Symptoms that Adult Clients Are Experiencing as a Result of Unresolved Child Sexual Assault and Abuse:

Source: www.womensissues.about.com

- 20% of all Child Victims Develop Serious Psychological Problems
- Triggers & Flashbacks: Stimulating the victim's memory back to the Child Sexual Assault and Abuse.
- Re-traumatization and Re-Victimization in Reliving the Violence via Triggers and Flashbacks.
- PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).
- Suicidal Ideation.
- Guilt.
- Depression.
- Anxiety.
- Low Self-Esteem.
- Substance Abuse.
- Unresolved Mental Health Issues related directly to the Child Sexual Abuse and Assault.
- Physical Health Problems related to the Mental Health Issues. (Mind and Body).
- Social Disengagement and the Inability to Maintain Steady Employment.
- Inter-Generational Perpetration of Violence Due to Unresolved Behavioral Issues.

These crisis hotline clients are a microcosm of all childhood sexual assault and abuse victims within the state. They are the face and the collateral damage of this “shroud of silence” and “our little secret” that historically has existed and is strongly associated with the Twentieth Century reaction to Child Sexual Assault and Abuse. This is a most stigmatized and marginalized population that has endured, and is most directly impacted by, the unresolved trauma of such childhood violence on a daily basis within their adult lives. Domestic violence, sexual assault and child specific abuses are crimes that have no boundaries. They cross every geographic, socio-economic, ethnic, race, gender and cultural demographic. And, they exist within all communities of Connecticut; urban, suburban and rural.

Now, in 2014, the Connecticut General Assembly has the opportunity to proactively enact legislation that will provide training to educators and to public school aged children in grades two (2) through five (5) about the dangers of Child Sexual Abuse and Assault; address prevention and intervention models; provide outreach to parent(s) and, “to establish uniform policies and procedures to assist children in the state who may be victims of sexual assault and abuse”.

Collaborative and Comprehensive Plan between the Department of Social Services, Department of Children and Families and the Department of Education to:

- Embrace teacher modules that address prevention, intervention, identification of and a response to Child Sexual Abuse and Assault.
- Engage educators and students in (grade appropriate) training;
- Develop strategies in prevention, intervention and in response to child sexual assault and abuse.
- Provide resources that encourage student/teacher/ parent education and outreach.
- Establish uniform policies and procedures to assist children who may be victims of sexual assault and abuse.

By looking back at the long-term effects of child sexual assault and abuse on crisis hotline clients, their associated symptoms caused by such trauma are daunting. In looking ahead, through the lens of this particular legislation and its proactive stance of embracing prevention, education, outreach and collaborative interventions, there exists a sense of hope for positive outcomes of child victims.

Facts & Statistics on Child Sexual Assault and Abuse:

Sources: www.womensissues.about.com & www.victimsofcrime.org.

- Almost 90, 000 Cases of Child Sexual Assault are Reported Each Year Nationally.
- Children Are Most Vulnerable to Sexual Abuse Between the Ages of 7 & 13.
- A 1000% Increased Risk of Re-victimization for Children with a Prior History of Sexual Victimization.
- 42% of School Officials Knew About Child Sexual Victim Episodes Compared to 13% Known by Police and 2% by Medical Professionals.

Short-Term Effects & Symptoms of Child Sexual Assault and Abuse Victims:

Source: www.womensissues.about.com.

- Behavioral Changes are Often the First Sign of Sexual Abuse.
- Mistrust, Nervous or Aggressive Behavior toward Adults.
- Chronic Depression
- Low Self Esteem
- Sexual Dysfunction
- Multiple Personalities

Domestic Violence is an act of control and power over the victim. In sexual assault and abuse, the building of a level of trust between perpetrator and child victim is crucial. By enacting legislation that has a strategic and collaborative inter-agency structure with key stakeholders invested in the prevention and intervention processes, this bill's framework will greatly impact the treatment options and outcomes of the child/victim in real-time. Bill No. 203, has the potential, to close critical gaps in the safety net by engaging, empowering and protecting children.

Thank you very much for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Maria Jordan
UConn MSW Candidate
Policy Practice Discipline
Class of 2015