



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Member Organizations

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services
Ansonia, CT

The Center for Family Justice
Bridgeport, CT

Women's Center
Danbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program United Services
Dayville, CT

Network Against Domestic Abuse
Enfield, CT

Domestic Abuse Services Greenwich YWCA
Greenwich, CT

Interval House
Hartford, CT

Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis
Meriden, CT

New Horizons
Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center
New Britain, CT

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services
New Haven, CT

Safe Futures
New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services
Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project
Torrington, CT

Safe Haven
Waterbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program United Services
Willimantic, CT

Testimony Regarding

HB 6824, AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2017, and Making Appropriations Therefor and Other Provisions Related to Revenue

Judicial Branch Budget

Appropriations Committee
March 5, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Winfield, Representative McCrory and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and our 18 member organizations that serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 50,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

Potential Impact of Transferring CSSD Programs to DCF

I am writing to ask you as you review the Governor's proposal to reassign the Judicial Department's Court Support Services Division Family Services into the Department of Children and Families (DCF) ***please consider the negative impact it can have on victims of domestic violence.***

CCADV has had a significant successful history of formal collaborations with Court Support Services Division. In 1986, the Connecticut General Assembly passed the Family Violence Prevention and Response Act that established the Family Violence Intervention Unit in each geographical area court. This unit included Court Support Services (CSSD) Family Services and the local non-profit Family Violence Victim Advocates (FVVAs). The unit assesses family violence cases, makes recommendations to the court, and provides support services and referrals to the victims involved. The working relationships between CSSD and the FVVAs that have developed ensure the continued creation, implementation and revision of policies and procedures for effective cooperation to enhance offender accountability and victim safety.

This structure established through law recognizes that victims need specialized support and advocacy in order to participate in the criminal court system while receiving the individualized protections they need to be safe. The intervention unit handles family violence cases applying a strong victim-focus reinforcing the important connection between confidentiality and victim safety. Both Court Support Services Division and Family Violence Victim Advocates are mandated reporters of child abuse. There are protections for victims regarding confidentiality for both entities. Under C.G.S. 46b-38c "all information provided to a family relations counselor, family relations counselor trainee or family services supervisor employed by the Judicial Department in a local family violence intervention unit shall be used solely for the purposes of preparation of the report and the protective order forms for each case and recommendation of services and shall otherwise be confidential and retained in the files of such unit and not be subject to subpoena or other court process for use in any other proceeding or for any other purpose." For Family Violence Victim Advocates, confidentiality has been established through C.G.S. 52-146k.

A victim's knowledge of their situation with a calculated safety plan often influences who, when, and if they will reach out for help. They must determine and weigh the impact of

(OVER)

the consequences of their reaching out. The victim often struggles with how this will further impact their family's safety and well-being. They anguish over the possibility of being arrested or losing custody of their children, which they are told repeatedly by the abuser. They fear reaching out for help will automatically trigger involvement with DCF and that their children will be removed from their care and protection.

Reassigning Court Support Services Division into DCF could jeopardize victim confidentiality, victim safety and deepen a victim's fear of losing their children. Ultimately, this move could create unintended consequences where victims will be even more reluctant to reach out for help and report domestic violence including violations of orders of protection.

I ask you to consider the safety of victims of domestic violence and the unintended consequences of reassigning Court Support Services Division Family Services into the Department of Children and Families.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Geralyn O'Neil-Wild
Director of Legal Advocacy
gwild@ctcadv.org