



Testimony of the Women's Center of Greater Danbury  
In support of funding for Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Services  
Melanie E. Danyliw, Director of Training & Program Development, Legislative Liaison

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Senator Bye, Representative Walker and honorable members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Melanie Danyliw, Director of Training & Program Development and legislative liaison at the Women's Center of Greater Danbury, a nonprofit social service agency - and member agency of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS.) We provide sexual assault services throughout upper Fairfield and lower Litchfield counties including Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman and Washington. During the 2013-14 fiscal year, the Women's Center helped 521 victims of sexual abuse through 3,160 crisis and individual and group counseling sessions and 1,981 hospital, police, court and multidisciplinary team advocacy contacts. Because our ability to provide these critical victim services as well as extensive community education on prevention and sensitive professional response to victims is significantly dependent on funding from CONNSACS through the rape crisis line item, we strongly urge you to reconsider the proposed \$200,000 reduction – an amount, awarded only last year, that represents the first increase in that line item in over twenty years.

The Women's Center is the sole provider of sexual violence services in our towns. As examples of the work this funding makes possible:

- Since 2007, through a formalized *Memorandum of Understanding* with our local university, Western Connecticut State University, we have had a strong presence on campus. As the lifetime risk of sexual violence is highest among youth and young adults, our immersion in these populations both in providing counseling to survivors as well as prevention education is critical. Our two part-time campus advocates are members of the Campus Response Team (CaRT) which gives us the opportunity to provide victim-centered insight into CaRT's work to align campus response to sexual assault with the Campus SaVE Act and other state and federal laws, including policy and procedure development. Together with our community educators, campus advocates provide bi-weekly *Slice of Life* events, averaging twenty participants as we rotate through the dorms. These psychoeducational discussions allow us to do prevention and bystander education; importantly, we are able to provide support to victims who may disclose and who then often continue with individual or group counseling offered in our very accessible campus-based office.
- Our community educators have conducted sensitive response training for campus police, course-focused classroom presentations, sorority risk reduction training, and, in conjunction with CHOICES, WCSU's alcohol prevention program, bystander intervention training to most male sports teams. These targeted educational interventions enhance our participation in campus-wide awareness events, including our Men's Initiative and CONNSACS' *Where Do You Stand Campaign*, and advance our goal of reinforcing a campus culture which - by being based in respect and equality, will reduce and eliminate sexual violence.

- As part of our community sexual assault services, and in addition to individual counseling, the Women’s Center offers sexual assault survivor groups for men and women. Participants in these groups are predominantly survivors of child sexual assault (CSA.) Especially for male survivors, male-only survivor groups are not widely offered. We often have men from towns outside of our service area attending, as there is no such local program. Recovery from any form of sexual violence is a long and painful journey. Most of the men in our *Voices of Courage* group have been attending for two years or longer. Recently, we had a graduate from our program. When he first joined, he professed that he would never tell anyone what had happened to him as a child. With the help of the group, he confronted that part of his life, with newfound strength disclosed to family and friends, and can now say, reflecting on his difficult journey, that he is “proud to be a survivor.”
- Recently, we have been able to again expand our outreach to specialized, often marginalized populations. We collaborate with one of our local mental health agencies to provide a monthly discussion group encompassing the many forms of interpersonal violence and also provide bi-lingual, bi-cultural counseling at Danbury’s *Hispanic Center*. On-site, we have created *Thriver* groups – survivors whose abuse issues, while in the past, still impact current functioning to various degrees. One of these *Thriver* groups offers specific counseling when substance abuse is a complicating factor.
- We are currently working with our local prison, FCI (Federal Correction Institution), to implement the requirements of the Prison Rape Elimination Act.
- As a last example, we are beginning to be able to offer our groups to our lower Litchfield County towns where survivors may find traveling to our Danbury location difficult.

These services are critically dependent on funding we receive through the rape crisis line item. At a time when we are increasingly asked to expand our services independently and through collaborations, many of which I have described above, cutting funding that sustains direct services to victims of sexual violence and their families as well as prevention efforts can have significant negative consequences. The Governor's proposed budget would decrease our state's support for direct victim services by 1/3, eliminating the increase provided by law makers last session.

Please support funding for Sexual Violence Prevention and Response services at FY 2015 levels.

[www.wcogd.org](http://www.wcogd.org)

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES  
 2 West Street, Danbury, CT 06810  
 p: 203-731-5200 f: 203-731-5207  
[womenscenter@wcogd.org](mailto:womenscenter@wcogd.org)

SEXUAL  
 ASSAULT  
 HOTLINE  
 203-731-5204

DOMESTIC  
 VIOLENCE  
 HOTLINE  
 203-731-5206

WOMEN'S  
 CENTER  
 HELPLINE  
 203-731-5200