



**Testimony of Heather Francisco  
Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury  
HB 6824: DPH Rape Crisis Line Item  
Appropriations Committee, March 5, 2015**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Heather Francisco; I am a sexual assault adult advocate at Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury. Our agency is one of nine community based sexual assault crisis programs in the state. We serve the towns of Bethlehem, Beacon Falls, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury. These programs are the only ones in our state that specialize in providing counseling and advocacy services to victims of sexual assault and their families.

I am writing to ask for your continued support and request that you do not cut the \$200,000 increase that the rape crisis line item received last year. This was the first increase in 20 years, and an increase that we desperately need to be able to continue to provide services for survivors in our community as well as keep up our prevention efforts. Sexual violence does not discriminate; it crosses all socio-economic classes, religions, sexual orientations and age groups. Approximately 40% of our clients at Safe Haven are child survivors of sexual violence. These survivors are our family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers.

Safe Haven Sexual Assault Crisis Services operates with a six member staff; two of which also assist with the Domestic Violence Services that we provide as a dual agency. Having such a limited staff means that everyone bears the burden of too much work and not enough money. We are already spread thin and this cut has the potential to result in reduction of staff and/or services provided within our community. Additionally, more work has been added by the recently enacted law that requires collaboration with college campuses and local sexual assault programs for both providing services as well as trainings. This additional work comes without funding to support it.



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Sexual assault survivors in Connecticut have been hurt by both the recession and by state and federal cuts to the public infrastructure. It is critical that we shore up the human services safety net so that our family members, friends and neighbors can get the help that they need when they face a sexual violence crisis. Community health and human services are crucial to the safety and security of Connecticut residents.

Over the past 20 years inflation has risen 56% (Cumulative Inflation Calculator, 2014); Sexual Assault Crisis Programs are not immune to the effects of this increase. We are faced daily with choices that affect our services for survivors and prevention efforts. How can we be expected to provide services on a budget that has not even come close to keeping up with inflation? The \$200,000 overall increase to the rape crisis line item last year (spread over the nine programs in the state) only increased each program's funding by a third. If inflation has risen 56% over 20 years and our funding has only risen 33%, this leaves us to make up the 23% difference with other sources of funding. Further, if we are expected to make up the entire difference by removing the \$200,000 increase, it could be crippling to our agency.

We have waited patiently for the past 20 years to see an increase in our funding and now the possibility that this increase could be revoked is, at very least, concerning. At this time we are not asking for additional funding as we understand firsthand how limited funds can effect one's budget allocations. We do ask however that you do not cut the funding we received last year and further reduce our already insufficient operating budget. Please support funding for Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Services at fiscal year 2015 levels. It would certainly be a shame if the state was unable to maintain this funding and redirect the necessary resources to continue this much needed work among the sexual assault programs in the state.

Thank you for taking the time to read this testimony.

Respectfully Submitted,

Heather Francisco



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