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**Executive Director**  
Ivonne Zucco

Dear Senator Bye and Representative Walker,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this testimony. The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education has been providing trauma informed counseling and advocacy support for victims and survivors of sexual violence since 1979 in the towns of Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Stamford, Weston, Westport, and Wilton. The rape crisis line item is an important source of funding not only for our agency, but for the state's nine community based sexual assault crisis programs, which are the only specialized services available in our state that support victims of the most underreported crime.

The demand for these services has continued to increase and the recent increase in the rape crisis line item has allowed our programs, along with the eight other community-based programs across the state, to address this demand. The services we provide our community include crisis counseling for victims and their families, group counseling for a variety of populations, and advocacy for victims in criminal investigations, medical examinations, and legal proceedings. Additionally we provide prevention services which encompass education on the subject for children K-12, parents and professionals in the community, including law enforcement and hospitals in our area. Each of these services has had an increase in demand or attention. Last year alone we served over 14,000 individuals.

The different services we provide work together to best support our community. The following is a story where our counseling, education, and advocacy services complemented each other to support a survivor and her family.

Soon after her fourteen birthday, Amy disclosed to her best friend that she was being physically and sexually abused by her stepfather. Amy's friend made the decision to tell Amy's grandmother who then asked Amy to speak with their parish priest (Father John) about what had happened.

Amy met with Father John and shared that she had been sexually abused by her stepfather since she was in the fifth grade. Father John called the police who took a formal police report from Amy. The police then referred Amy and her family to The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education (The Center). Both Amy and her mother received twelve sessions individual crisis counseling, from two different counselors, at no cost to their family.

During Amy's first session with her crisis counselor, she shared that the first time she had validation that she was being sexually abused by her stepfather was in sixth grade when she participated in a presentation given by The Center's Education Department at her school. Amy said that during the presentation she learned several things that she did not know before: that she was not at fault for the sexual abuse, that perpetrators like her step-father use threats and manipulation to commit the sexual abuse, that she is not the only child who has had this experience and that she has options for when and who she can tell about what was happening to her. Like many perpetrators of child sexual abuse, Amy's step-father used threats and manipulation to make her feel as though she was deserving of the sexual abuse and that it was her fault it was happening. Like many survivors of child sexual abuse, Amy did not know what was happening to her had a name, she knew that it was wrong and she did not like it, but she did not have the words to describe her experiences.

Although Amy waited several years to disclose her sexual abuse she shared that she never forgot what she learned in sixth grade from The Center's prevention education class, and that it was this moment when she knew that her abuse would eventually stop.

The Governor's proposed budget would decrease the counseling and advocacy services and support for victims in our state by a third. The rise in national attention to sexual violence in institutions such as public schools, colleges and the military has led to new federal and state laws that allow programs to support survivors in telling their story, finding justice, and healing from their abuse. The community we service depends on our expertise for counseling and advocacy and if the past increase in funding is cut the quality of the services we provide will have to suffer.

Now is not the time to decreasing funding that supports victims of sexual violence. We ask that you please support the funding for Sexual Violence and Response services at the Fiscal Year 2015 levels.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ivonne Zucco', written in a cursive style with a large loop at the end.

Ivonne Zucco, Executive Director  
The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education