Testimony in Support of

SB 651, AAC a Temporary Hold for Certain Family Violence Arrestees
HB 7004, AAC Implementation of the Recommendations of the Task Force to Study Service of Restraining Orders
HB 7005, AAC Domestic Violence Offender Program Standards and Increased Protections for Victims of Domestic Violence

Judiciary Committee
March 16, 2015

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Representative McGorty and members of the committee. I am writing on behalf of The Center for Family Justice of Bridgeport which is the domestic violence and sexual assault crisis agency that serves Bridgeport, Stratford, Trumbull, Monroe, Fairfield, and Easton. Last year our agency served about 4000 survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and secondary victims including children. The Center for Family Justice provides a range of services including prevention education in schools, advocacy and counseling to survivors, support groups, and court advocacy for the criminal and civil court process. As one of eighteen member agencies of Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) we feel strongly about the domestic violence bills that have been raised this year.

We urge your support of Senate Bill 651 and House Bills 7004 and 7005.

SB 651

Currently, a domestic violence offender who is arrested can immediately make bond and return to the community. Despite the police issuing conditions of release, the offender may return to the victim's home. This is a very dangerous time as the offender typically blames the victim for the arrest. This bill proposes that police be able to hold a domestic violence offender for up to twelve hours if certain elements were present during the crime. The risk factors have been studied by Dr. Jackie Campbell who has provided extensive research on lethality and risk factors in domestic violence situations. Utilizing the research and applying it to high danger domestic violence situations can prevent future violence and even homicides. The extra time allows the victim to access services and safety plan for the release of the offender.

HB 7004

This bill incorporates recommendations that are the result of the legislative Task Force to Study Service of Restraining Orders, which concluded its work in January of this year. The task force included a comprehensive set of stakeholders including domestic violence advocates, state marshals, law enforcement, attorneys (including a prosecutor, public defender and legal aid attorney), a family court judge and court operations personnel. The task force made several recommendations to improve restraining order service which will help keep victims safe and allow more offenders to be served (resulting in more enforceable orders). The existing system of serving restraining orders can be a significant burden on the applicant of the restraining order. Many applicants are very afraid for their safety and to not provide them with the most efficient service really puts them in a heightened level of fear. A victim of domestic violence should not have one more thing added to his or her list of concerns just because Connecticut's restraining order service methods are not the most effective.

HB 7005

Two important aspects of domestic violence are addressed in this bill. The first is the proposal to standardize batterer intervention programs throughout the state. There are a significant amount of domestic violence defendants who are ordered to complete a batterer intervention program as part of court conditions while the case is pending or as part of probation. Ensuring that appropriate and evidence

based programs are being utilized helps to change offenders' behavior and to manage victims' expectations of programs. If advocates do not have information about what the programs are providing then it is difficult to safety plan around the defendant's completion of the program. Connecticut is 1 of only 6 states that have not established standards for its batterer intervention programs. Of the 44 states with program standards, 70% are statutory and include enforcement mechanisms. This statistic demonstrates how important other states find this standardization and it seems appropriate for Connecticut to follow suit.

This bill also addresses domestic violence victim confidentiality. Currently, victims of domestic violence are not provided the same confidentiality as sexual assault victims are in the media. There are already so many barriers to reporting domestic violence. Victims feel shame and embarrassment about the abuse and thinking that their name maybe published just adds another obstacle. I was watching a local news channel recently and a story about a domestic violence arrest came on. The camera focused in on a page of the warrant which had the victim's name, address, and details about the crime. These incidents are very personal and traumatic for victims. The media should not exacerbate the situation by releasing victim information.

Again, we urge your support of these important measures. Thank you for your consideration.

Kayte Cwikla-Masas
The Center for Family Justice
203-334-6154
kcwikla@centerforfamilyjustice.org