

**Testimony Regarding HB 5044, AA Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017**

Dear Members of the Appropriation Committee:

**Please take this true story into consideration when weighing the pros and cons of any budget cuts to domestic violence services in Connecticut and the importance of keeping domestic violence services as a separate line item in the state budget.**

**The Center for Family Justice** is a member program of the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence located in Bridgeport, CT. The Center serves the towns of Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Monroe, Stratford, and Trumbull.

The Center for Family Justice breaks the cycle of abuse and violence – domestic, sexual and child – by providing services that create hope, restore lives and drive social change through education and community collaboration.

**Our Client Story**

In the month of December, client Jane left her abusive fiancé along with her young children and went to stay with her sister and her children. When her abuser found out where she was staying, he drove by the home in the dark hours of the morning and fired 15 rounds into the home where bullets proceeded to pass over the heads of all in the home, including the sleeping children. Luckily, nothing but property was harmed during the shooting, though Jane lost her children to DCF following this incident. Jane later decided to return home to her abuser much to the dismay of her family. Jane would later explain to her Advocate that she felt she had no other choice to protect her family than to return to him; that for her to come home was all he wanted and that would stop the violence against others. A common ideology of domestic abuse victims who sacrifice their own wellbeing for the hope that others will be spared. When he came home to find Jane had returned, he became combative; blaming Jane for new charges to his probation and demanding money to cover his inevitable upcoming bail expenses. When Jane, of course, replied that she didn't have the money, her fiancé began to aggressively physically assault her. Jane would later show her Advocate the deep dark bruising all over her body. In a last ditch attempt of self-preservation, Jane told her abuser that if he would drop her off at her attorney's office with whom she's involved regarding a class action lawsuit where she receives payments as a result of medical negligence during childbirth, that she would get him the money. Her Advocate would later commend her quick thinking and remind her that in doing so she may very well have saved her own precious life.

Upon arrival at her attorney's office, Jane pleaded for help. Her attorney took one look at the marks all over her body, her disheveled appearance, and overall level of desperation, and drove her to the courthouse to meet with The Center for Family Justice's domestic violence/family violence Court Advocates. The Court Advocates listened to Jane's story and directed her to The Center for Family Justice's main office where Jane was seen as a crisis walk-in by The Center's Senior Advocate. Jane's attorney drove her from the courthouse to the main office and waited

with her in The Center for Family Justice's waiting room until the Senior Advocate greeted them in person. Jane was at The Center for Family Justice for a total of approximately 6 hours where she had arrived, tearful and afraid, adamant that she did not want to report her abuser to the police as she felt it would only cause more danger to her family.

Behind the protective walls of The Center for Family Justice's locked facility and corridors and surrounded by trauma informed Advocates and staff working collaboratively to keep Jane safe, Jane gathered the strength to file a police report. Her Advocate called 911 on her behalf and requested an officer arrive at his or her earliest convenience to take Jane's statement of assault at the hand of her fiancé with the support of her mother and sister who later joined her at The Center with her belongings for shelter. Prior to the officer's arrival, Jane and her Advocate collaboratively discussed domestic violence shelter availabilities and Jane selected a top choice out of the available options; a process that marks the beginning of her return to control over her own existence.

While the officer took Jane's statement, Jane's Advocate was in and out of the meeting room, coordinating shelter space, securing transportation to shelter, and communicating with office staff regarding the make and model of her fiancé's car as well as a personal description for which to be watching the external cameras and admittance to the building. Jane's Advocate provided Jane with food and water throughout the entire experience from the agency's emergency food supplies. Jane was sent to shelter with food, hygiene products, and clothing from The Center for Family's emergency shelter supplies aimed at assisting survivors through this very scenario.

Without the help of an active bystander with awareness of The Center for Family Justice's services, the trauma informed care of The Center for Family Justice's Advocates, office, and hotline staff as well as The Center's secure, lockdown facility, it is a frightening thought to imagine where Jane might be today. Jane only had her abuser's permission to be gone for an hour to get money from her attorney. She had been gone for nearly half the day. He had been on the hunt for her. He was later found by police as a result of Jane's report.

**Again, please take this true story into consideration when weighing the pros and cons of budget cuts for domestic violence services. Remembering that this story is not one in a million; but ONE of millions.**

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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