

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

Samantha came to our Center as crisis walk-in, referred by her Adult Education Center where she is in the process of learning English to achieve her goals of employment. Samantha came to our agency scared to speak at first, as she had never disclosed the abuse to anyone before. She was also afraid of being judged and the potential embarrassment it may bring to her family. Samantha came in feeling desperate because she could no longer live with the guilt and abuse from her ex-husband.

Samantha divorced her abuser due to his ongoing abuse and control over her everyday life, including where she was going, who she was with, and what she was doing. Samantha stated he would call her names every day that were offensive and degrading. When she finally felt strong enough to leave the relationship, her abuser refused to let the relationship end and began stalking her. He would follow her everywhere, call to harass her and even attempted to pit her family against her by convincing them to tell her to go back to him. When Samantha remarried and had a son, her ex-husband believed her son was his and threatened to take her to court if she did not let him see her son. In court it was determined that they would have to take a paternity test. Her ex-husband, rather than following through with the court's instructions, confronted Samantha at her school and insisted she take a drive with him privately to discuss the situation. When Samantha got in the car, he brought her to a wooded area about 30 minutes away from the school. He then proceeded to tie her to a tree and rape her so violently, that she passed out from the pain. The attack left Samantha physically ill, bleeding profusely, and she was rushed to the hospital days later, where she was diagnosed with kidney failure, most likely due to the internal injuries she sustained during the assault. Samantha stated she felt both angered and scared; however, her abuser threatened to take away her son if she told the police.

Samantha stated that while in the hospital, her ex-husband came to visit her and raped her again. This time he threatened to kill her and her husband if she reported to the police. Samantha was afraid that if she told anyone, then something bad would happen. Samantha began receiving counseling services with a domestic violence Bilingual Advocate at The Center for Family Justice, where she slowly became more comfortable telling her story. Towards the end of her sessions, Samantha expressed she felt empowered to now to report the ongoing abuse and sexual assaults to the police. The Advocate helped Samantha to make the police report with two different departments since it was a case in both jurisdictions. The Advocate arranged for the police to come to our center where the client would feel most comfortable and then met with the client and detective in one of our satellite locations. The Advocate also helped translate for client with both departments. Samantha stated she would still need help to process the next steps she had taken, the Advocate referred and connected the client to a community service agency to provide her with long term counseling. Our partnership with this community agency helped us to be able to provide further assistance to clients who for many reasons may not have access to health insurance which would help to pay for counseling. Samantha also stated that another reason she never reported him to the police was because she was afraid that her immigration process would be canceled if immigration knew what she had gone through. The Advocate connected Samantha with an institute that helps immigrants and refugees to explore options with immigration. Samantha did not want her lawyer to know what had happened but wanted information on how it would affect her case. The Advocate was also able to connect client with help from victim services to help her understand and provide support during the court process.

Later on the Advocate received another call from Samantha that DCF had gotten involved since she disclosed during one of her counseling sessions that her ex-husband continued to rape her by breaking into her house when her current husband wasn't around and, unfortunately, her son was present during two of the sexual assaults. Samantha was afraid that her son would be taken away and the Advocate helped the client to understand the process of the forensic interview her son would have to go through here at The Center. The Advocate also provided support to Samantha and her husband during this interview process. Samantha will continue with her counseling and other services; however, she can now focus on empowering herself because she no longer has to carry the burden of carrying this secret with her.

The story of Samantha is common. Domestic violence abusers will try to keep control of their victims by using threats and intimidation as a tactic to make sure the victim will do what they want. Samantha would not have been able to disclose this information and receive the help that she did if it were not for the funding for all of these different services.

Our domestic violence Support group clients have also stated that if it weren't for the help that we have provided, most of them would have died in the hand of their abusers. It is important to understand that the only way we will end all violence and abuse is to show their perpetrators that victims are not alone. We also need to show our children that they are the key to ending these vicious cycles. However this will only be happen when we stop prioritizing funding for domestic violence victims in our state budgets.

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

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