



Working toward ending domestic violence

**HB 5054, AA Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence
HB 5623 – AAC Against Violence Against Women and Victims of Human Trafficking**

**TESTIMONY OF PENNI MICCA
SUBMITTED TO JUDICIAL COMMITTEE
Friday, March 14, 2016**

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and members of the Judicial Committee. Interval House is one of Connecticut's largest and oldest domestic violence organizations. My role at Interval House is that of a law enforcement advocate. I am co-located at the Manchester Police Department as part of a specialty unit called the Domestic Violence Outreach Team (DVOT). With every service my colleagues and I provide to victims of domestic violence, there is a component of safety planning. Ongoing safety planning is crucial. I am here to submit testimony pertaining to two bills that have the potential to modify ex-parte restraining orders drastically and the potential to impact the safety of TRO applicants and those close to them.

We urge you to support **HB 5054 – An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence** and sections 1-17 of **HB 5623 – An Act Concerning Violence Against Women and Victims of Human Trafficking**. By doing so, you will strengthen state laws and better protect victims of domestic violence. Firearms should be surrendered within 24 hours of being served rather than one to two weeks later depending on the hearing date. Given the risks associated with gun ownership by batterers, there is an urgent need for this change.

I spend a great deal of time going over options with women who are looking to get out of abusive relationships or keep their former partners away from them because they feel terrorized and at risk day in day out. They are often amazed when they learn that if an ex parte restraining order is put into place, the courts will immediately (upon service):

- Prohibit the respondent from returning to his home
- Prohibit him from being within a designated distance from her
- Prohibit him from having any contact with her whatsoever, and
- Prohibit him (in some cases) from having any contact with his children

However, he does not have to surrender his firearms for up to two weeks! They find it incredulous and it really is. I can't tell you how many times I've been asked, "*He doesn't have to turn over his guns? What are they going to do, wait until he kills me?*" Some go forward with the restraining order; some will not. "*You don't understand*", they say to me, "*He has the guns, he will kill me.*"

Even for victims for which firearms aren't an issue, they worry about the respondent lying in wait for them after being served. When access to a firearm is thrown into the mix – the same firearm that the respondent has used to scare, threaten and harm them, often makes a woman feel like a target - *even though the order refers to her as the "protected party"*.

HB 5054 also addresses several recommendations of the Task Force to Study Service of Restraining Orders (established in Public Act 14-217). The bill proposes several improvements to service of restraining orders including:

- Improved services for applicants pertaining to ease of process and changes in service that enhance safety and
- Articulating law enforcement's role in the process.

As a package, the bills specify clear procedures for the mechanism, immediacy and duration of gun removal and marshal service. Law enforcement and the courts will be able to increase systemic protections.

Both HB 5054 and HB 5623 work to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence. When victims come forward they show tremendous courage, and they deserve a system that does everything it can to help keep them safe. So, please vote yes on both of these bills.

Thank you.

If I can answer any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.