



Testimony regarding

In Support of HB 5605, AA Concerning the Termination of Parental Rights

Judiciary Committee  
March 14, 2016

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Representative Buck-Taylor, Representative Godfrey, Representative Harding, Senator McLachlan, Representative O'Neill, Representative Shaban, Representative Smith and members of the committee. My name is Ann Rodwell-Lawton and I am the Legislative Liaison and Director of Education, Training, and Outreach at the Women's Center of Greater Danbury. The Women's Center is the sole provider of services to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault in upper Fairfield and lower Litchfield county areas. During fiscal year 2015, the Women's Center provided life-saving services to over 26,817 individuals in our 13 town service area. All services provided were free, confidential, and trauma informed. These services include emergency shelter, individual counseling, safety planning, court and hospital advocacy, support groups, crisis intervention through two 24 hour hotlines, and educational and primary prevention programs. We serve victims and their children in 13 towns in the Greater Danbury area including Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, and Washington.

**Please support HB 5605 to update the standard by which the parental rights of rapists are determined. Victims of sexual assault should not be forced to continue an ongoing relationship with their perpetrator and should not be held unfairly to a higher standard of proof for restricting custody rights.**

A criminal conviction is the current standard by which judges may terminate parental rights of rapists in Connecticut. Rapists who are not convicted of sexual assault are able to exercise custody rights over children conceived from their rapes. For victims this often results in years of manipulation and harassment from their rapists as they have to consult with their rapists on matters such as school, extracurricular activities, and other matters relating to their child's livelihood.

We cannot expect victims to recover from their sexual assault if they are forced to have continued communication with their rapists. At the Women's Center we often hear victims' frustrations with having to co-parent with their rapists. Perpetrators often use the threat of taking over full custody rights of the children to gain power and control over their victim.

We support HB 5605 because it would adopt the "clear and convincing standard" for the restriction of custody right of rapists. In Connecticut, this is the standard judges apply for all other reasons to terminate parental rights. Survivors of sexual assault should not be held unfairly to a higher standard of proof to terminate parental rights. Additionally, the newly passed federal Rape Survivor Custody Act increases Violence Against Women Act funding for states that adopt the clear and convincing evidence standard for women to terminate parental rights of their rapist.

Please support HB5605, An Act Concerning the Termination of Parental Rights. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

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