

Board of Directors

Kim Hekking
President

Gayle Weinstein
Vice President

Joan Lombardozzi
Secretary

Clifton E. Benham
Kim Dickinson
Michelle M. Diliberto
Melissa Gallaher-Smith
Lisa Maronian
Tuesday Tamburri

Advisory Council

Mary Abbazia
Impact Planning Group

Christopher M. Bogart, Ph.D.
Southfield Center for Development

Sergeant Matthew Brodacki
Technical Investigation Unit,
Southwest Connecticut

Anthony Crisci
Triangle Community Center

Michael Diliberto
Priceline.com

Julie Fareri, Esq.
Fareri Associates, LP

Jenn Gruen M.D.
Village Pediatrics

Rev. Dr. Kate Heichler
Interfaith Council of
Southwestern Connecticut

Kate Vivanco EdM, LCSW
Centro Bienestar

Dudley Williams
GE Asset Management

Sergeant Mark Zuccerella
Greenwich Police Department,
Special Victims Section

Executive Director

Ivonne Zucco

February 18, 2016

TESTIMONY OF IVONNE ZUCCO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS COUNSELING AND EDUCATION

Respectfully submitted to the Appropriations Committee of the CT State Legislature

Dear Senator Bye, Representative Walker and committee members,

The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education provides free and confidential counseling and support services for all victims of sexual violence, including children, women and men in Lower Fairfield County (Greenwich, Stamford, Darien, New Canaan, Norwalk, Weston, Wilton and Westport). Our bilingual (English and Spanish) services are available 24-hours a day, 7-days a week. We are there every step of the way from when the victim enters the emergency room, to assisting with police statements and preliminary court proceedings, all the way to trial. We deliver goal oriented counseling and support groups to help victims and their loved ones heal. We also partner with many agencies in the community to obtain other services our clients need. The Center is one of the nine member sexual assault crisis service programs of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS.)

We also provide prevention and appropriate response education to the community at large, including parents, human services professionals, college campus, law enforcement, and hospitals in our area. Additionally, The Center provides free age-appropriate prevention education for children ages 4-18. Being in the classroom, give us the opportunity to receive disclosures and be the first responders and reporters.

Thanks to the support, through the rape crisis line item in the State budget, The Center has been able to provide crisis counseling to 484 individuals, respond to 253 hotline calls, and respond to 23 hospital calls in the 2014-15 fiscal year alone. Thanks solely to the generosity of our donors and other grant sources, we have been able to provide prevention education to nearly 14,000 students and community members. Everyday we assist many on their long journey to recovery. Here is only one example of why our services are so critical:

The Center received a hotline call at 7:00am one morning from a local hospital. An adult female had just been sexually assaulted while running on a track at a local public beach. Our counselor/advocate immediately met the victim at the hospital and spent the following six hours accompanying the victim during the initial interview with the police, performing the Evidence Collection Kit, and per victim's request, stayed with her until discharge. Later that evening, our counselor/advocate then accompanied the victim at the local police department during the filing of the formal police report. In the weeks after the assault, our counselor/advocate provided free and confidential crisis counseling for the victim. In addition to providing the crisis counseling sessions, our counselor/advocate also assisted the victim in navigating the victim compensation program and filing a claim to ensure that she would receive compensation for all items lost as the result of the assault and the ongoing investigation.

Without the 24-hour hotline, crisis counseling and advocacy services, this victim, and so many others like her, would not have had the knowledge or emotional ability to navigate the criminal justice system or the tools for ongoing healing and recovery. Many times, The Center is the first and only place a victim can turn to for support. Because Sexual Assault is a silent, shameful crime, it is not easy for victims to come forward, so it is important that services are delivered in a professional, caring, trauma sensitive manner. In order to ensure that we can continue providing the community with these professional services, we need to make sure that our funding will be kept at the same level.

The statistics are staggering:

- Every **107 seconds** another American is sexually assaulted
- Nearly **1 in 5 Connecticut residents** has experienced a sexual assault in their lifetime and **14% of Connecticut residents** has experienced a childhood sexual assault.
- **1 in 4 girls** and **1 in 6 boys** will be a victim of sexual violence before their 18th birthday.

As you probably are aware, non-profit organizations, which support the communities with the much needed services for the disadvantaged are constantly at risk. On one hand, we are asked to manage our services more like a for-profit business and are held to high standards of outcome reporting, which is absolutely fair. On the other hand, it is very difficult to manage our organizations when funding is constantly at stake. Moreover, sexual abuse services, is one of more difficult issues for which to find private funding. Yet, it is one of the most traumatic situations a person can suffer and the effects of a violation like this can last a lifetime inadvertently affecting families and our communities at large. Now that we are reaching a higher level of awareness, and federal and state laws encourage reporting, collaboration and prevention, this is not the time to cut direct support to the victims who might be finally feeling freed from the silence they were forced to endure for many years.

The Governor's proposal, which consolidates and reduces all line item funding for public health related budgets, will have a significant impact on our ability to provide these services. Additionally, because of the reduction to the total amount allocated from Public Health, nonprofits that support the most vulnerable in our population will be forced to compete for essential funding.

I thank you for your prior commitment to help victims of sexual violence. We ask that you maintain your commitment and support funding so that we can continue to support those victims and survivors of sexual violence who need our help to seek medical care, emotional support and justice for the crime committed against them.

Sincerely,



Ivonne Zucco
Executive Director