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TESTIMONY OF GAYLE WEINSTEIN, VICE PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF THE CENTER FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT CRISIS COUNSELING AND EDUCATION

Respectfully submitted to the Appropriations Committee of the CT State Legislature

February 18, 2016

Dear Senator Bye and Representative Walker:

My name is Gayle Weinstein and I am Vice-President of the Board of The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education in Stamford, CT. Thank you for the opportunity to testify against the Governor's proposal to reduce funding and consolidate our line item funding into a Public Health General Fund.

As a former First Selectman, I fully understand the difficult decisions that are necessary to create a balanced, realistic budget and welcome the opportunity to discuss the important work of the regional centers that make up the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, and demonstrate how State funding is critical to fulfilling our mission. In fact, 6 years ago as First Selectman, I took a similar zero-based budget approach where every dollar was publicly defended to the Board of Selectmen, the Board of Finance, and most importantly, to the public.

The Governor's proposal of merging all Public Health related line items into one General Fund eliminates this transparency of process, and takes away the impacted agencies ability to defend our need. It concentrates the power into the Commissioner of Public Health's purview, without input from the Legislative body, the impacted agencies, or from the public. The Center already maintains high standards of accountability and reports to The Alliance and subsequently to the Department of Public Health on a regular basis with statistics and program reports and I would welcome the opportunity to publicly share that information.

Compounding this issue of transparency is the 5.75% reduction in the newly established General Fund. Zero-based budgeting should be based on actual need and reducing funding without establishing that need is not fair to those who rely on our services. Rather than fostering collaboration between Public Health agencies, this will cause competition for a limited pot of funding, as it is unclear how the Commissioner would determine cuts to existing funding levels. Competition for funding based on results and outcomes is most useful when comparing two agencies that are providing the same service. Who among us feels that could determine who more is worthy: A child in need of medical help or a person who was brutally raped?

We are most thankful for the Federal and State funding which is passed to us through funding of the CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence. This funding is critical to providing 24/7 bilingual rape crisis hotlines, victim advocacy services and short

term counseling to victims, all free of charge. Not only are we the only agency in our Region to provide these services, we are often the only option for short term counseling and assistance with the judicial process to low income and Spanish speaking families. The other critical component of our mission is prevention and education programs to reduce the incidence of sexual violence, for which we receive absolutely no State funding, even though new mandates require K-12 education.

As a Board member, I accept my responsibility to raise funds to support our mission. Our Executive Director, Development Director and Board work tirelessly to obtain new grants and raise contribution levels. But as we all know, it has become harder and harder for nonprofits to raise funds, and our Board is doing the best we can. Sexual Violence and rape are still considered taboo subjects, making it more difficult to raise funds, as compared to a nonprofit that supports breast cancer, for example. Most Boards are still down approximately 20-30% over 2005 giving levels, and our agency will lose approximately \$10-15,000 due to the relocation of GE.

To be blunt, we are already struggling. We have lost 3 key staff members in the past year alone, solely because we cannot afford to pay a living wage. All 7 full time employees are paid well below market rate, and stay because they are committed to our mission. If we were to lose State funding, we would have to choose between providing free and confidential services to victims or providing prevention and education programs to our students, school and Town employees, and the community at large.

I strongly believe that it is Government's role to protect the most vulnerable populations in our society. I thank you for your past support and ask that you continue your support of victims of sexual violence. Please restore line item funding for rape crisis services so that we can continue to provide crisis intervention and advocacy services to hundreds of child, adolescent and adult victims of sexual violence.

