



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Testimony Regarding

HB 5044, AA Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2017

Member Organizations

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services

Ansonia, CT

The Center for Family Justice

Bridgeport, CT

Women's Center

Danbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program

United Services

Dayville, CT

Network Against Domestic Abuse

Enfield, CT

Domestic Abuse Services

Greenwich YWCA

Greenwich, CT

Interval House

Hartford, CT

Chrysalis Domestic Violence Services

Meriden, CT

New Horizons

Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center

New Britain, CT

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services

New Haven, CT

Safe Futures

New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center

Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services

Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center

Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project

Torrington, CT

Safe Haven

Waterbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program United Services

Department of Social Services Budget

Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2016

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to over 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We respectfully ask that you carefully consider any cuts to an already stressed nonprofit human services system that provides help to victims of domestic violence. Providers already struggle to meet the high demand for services and need to help keep victims safe. Further cuts to this system will be devastating and leave many victims and their children with no place to turn for help.

We also respectfully oppose the proposed block grant system for human services, including domestic violence services, and ask that you please consider its potential impact on an already fragile system and the ability of service providers and advocates to ever effect change to the funding stream for their services.

Current financial realities of domestic violence services

In fiscal year 2015, over 41,000 victims of domestic violence sought help at one of CCADV's 18 member organizations, including 2,323 victims (1,165 adults and 1,158 children) who sought emergency shelter because they faced physical danger and had no other safe place to go. Victims and their children receive life-saving services including counseling, support groups, safety planning and court advocacy.

Shelter utilization has increased 93% over the last 7 years to the point that most shelters in the state run over capacity on consistent basis (an average of 110% capacity in FY 2015). Average utilization in FY 2008 was 57%, growing to 95% by FY 2013. Increased knowledge about services through public awareness efforts and coordinated outreach efforts through programs such as the Lethality Assessment Program (a partnership with law enforcement), result in more requests for services.

The length of time that a victim remains in emergency shelter has also increased by 62% in last 7 years. In FY 2008, the average length of stay in shelter was 26 days, extending to 37 days in FY 2013 and 42 days in FY 2015. Victims are presenting with more acute, complex needs, such as high risk pregnancies, mental health and substance use issues that require longer shelter stays and additional residential supports until stable, appropriate housing can be identified and secured. Those needs coupled with reductions to the other human services needed by victims, like behavioral health services, and a lack of affordable housing often leaves victims with no place else to go. Either they stay in shelter or they return home to their abuser – a potentially fatal option.

As our 18 member organizations struggle to meet a demand for shelter that is significantly higher than what is available, they are also asked to provide those

services for a fraction of the actual cost. Current state funding levels provide \$7 per day per person housed in emergency shelter. This funding is expected to cover mortgage/lease payments, utilities and staffing. This funding is not an accurate reflection of those costs. Programs must direct increasing amounts of staff time and resources to extensive private fundraising to fill this gap, thus diverting further from direct services for victims and their children.

Impact of proposed block grant system

The proposed system of block granting as it currently appears will result in little to no transparency for CCADV or our 18 member organizations to understand what, if any, funding will be allocated to our services. The main source of state funding for domestic violence services is included in the “domestic violence shelters” line item historically in the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget. This funding covers shelter operations, including mortgage/lease payments and utilities, as well as shelter and some advocate staffing. This line item, along with 16 other DSS line items, is proposed to be moved under the newly created “agency operations” line item.

Under the proposed system, it will be up to the Commissioner to determine what constitutes a “core service” of DSS and whether or not services for victims of domestic violence should be included as part of those core services. If these services are considered “core,” there would still not be a clear indication of how much of the department’s funding will be directed to domestic violence. The Commissioner could decide to fund those services at increased or decreased levels from what the Legislature has historically allocated to them. It is also unclear when those decisions would be made and how far in advance providers would be informed of a cut.

In short, such a system with a lack of transparency will leave advocates in the dark when it comes to funding. And if an agency Commissioner decides to provide less funding or no funding for a given service, to whom would we advocate? The Commissioner and Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management are not elected to office; they work for the Governor. The Governor is one person. Instead of having 151 elected legislators to debate an issue and make a decision about priorities, only one person’s priorities will prevail. It will be difficult for advocates or victims to ever effect change under such a system.

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

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