



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

## Testimony regarding

### SB 319, AAC Notification to Schools of Protective or Restraining Orders Affecting Students

Education Committee  
March 2, 2016

#### 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**  
Willimantic, CT

Good morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and our 18 member organizations that 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.

Existing state law allows victims of domestic violence who are protected under civil restraining orders or criminal protective orders to request that the court clerk forward a copy of the order to their elementary or secondary school or college. This bill seeks to require that, in instances where the protected person is enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school, restraining and protective orders be automatically forwarded to the local or regional board of education where that student is enrolled. While we do not necessarily oppose such a requirement, we do want to highlight two important areas to consider as this measure moves forward.

#### Victim Confidentiality

Victim confidentiality is an extremely important piece of working with victims of domestic violence. It is currently not public information when someone obtains a civil restraining order, this bill will change that by requiring that public schools be notified of the existence of such an order. This will eliminate the choice for some victims to tell anyone about the order. While it is understandable that victim safety may be the first issue to consider, putting victim safety above victim confidentiality can sometimes unintentionally result in decreasing that victim's safety. Coming forward in a public forum is a significant step for victims of domestic violence, due in no small part to a culture of victim-blaming that persists to this day. If a victim is not ready to share her or his abuse outside of seeking court-ordered protection, than she or he may feel, as a result of this proposal, that going to the court is not an option because she or he will not be able to control who learns of the abuse.

While it appears that the language seeks to control who within the school system is provided information about the existence of a restraining or protective order and how that information can be used, we cannot stress enough that implementation and guidance provided to school districts on this proposed process must be comprehensive. Any failure to maintain confidentiality can be devastating. Violating a victim's trust and removing control over decisions will drive many victims away from ever seeking help again. The restraining order application will also need to clearly state that public elementary or secondary schools will be notified if 1) the applicant or her or his children are enrolled at any such school and 2) the order is granted by the court.

#### Training & Education

The bill proposes that information about existing orders be shared with local or regional school boards "for the purposes of assessing the risk of danger posed by or to such person and effectuating an appropriate modification of such person's education plan or placement, and for disciplinary purposes." It is unclear what tool will be used to assess risk and whether or not the person assessing risk is required to have any training related to domestic violence or teen dating violence.

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-220a requires that, within available appropriations, each local and regional board of education provide in-service training programs for teachers, administrators and pupil personnel on the prevention of risk taking behavior by children and its relationship to teen dating violence and domestic violence, among other behaviors. This statute includes 10 potential topics to include as part of the unfunded in-service training, with a subset of 7 topics to potentially address related to “health and mental health risk reduction,” which **may** include teen dating violence or domestic violence.

The state neither funds nor requires comprehensive training and education on the basic elements of domestic violence or teen dating violence, let alone risk assessment for perpetrators. Requiring notification to schools of potential risk while failing to properly prepare them to intervene is not good policy. While this bill will provide schools with information about restraining or protective orders, it is safe to say that the existence of teen dating violence among students or domestic/intimate partner violence among their parents extends far beyond the number of orders that a school may be notified about in any given year. According to the Connecticut Department of Public Health 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey<sup>1</sup>:

- 26% of CT high school students report being verbally or emotionally abused (33.9% female; 19.1% male)
- 9% of CT high school students report being physically hurt on purpose by a dating partner (10.1% female; 7.9% male)
- 11% of CT high school students report being forced by someone they were dating or “going out with” to do sexual things when they did not want to (15.5% female; 7.3% male)

It is crucial that we better prepare schools to prevent and respond to all cases of domestic violence and teen dating violence experienced by students.

We strongly urge this committee to include language that requires training and education related to domestic violence and teen dating violence for, at the very least, those positions enumerated in this bill as having responsibility to respond when the school board is notified that a restraining or protective order has been granted. We also recommend that the State Department of Education work in conjunction with domestic violence advocates to develop a statewide dating violence awareness and prevention program for use by local and regional boards of education. Such program should include:

- (1) For teachers, evidence-based instructional modules that may include, but not be limited to, (A) training regarding the prevention and identification of, and response to, dating violence, and (B) resources to further student, teacher and parental awareness and prevention of dating violence;
- (2) For students, age appropriate, evidence-based educational materials designed for children in grades kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, regarding dating violence awareness and prevention that may include, but not be limited to, (A) the skills to (i) recognize dating violence, (ii) recognize controlling behaviors in the context of intimate relationships, (iii) identify and develop healthy relationship boundaries, and (B) strategies to (i) promote disclosure, (ii) reduce self-blame and increase self-worth, and (iii) mobilize bystanders; and,
- (3) A uniform dating violence response policy and reporting procedure that may include, but not be limited to, (A) a statement that dating violence will not be tolerated within the local or regional school district, (B) actions that victims of dating violence may take to obtain assistance from the local or regional school district, (C) intervention and counseling options for victims of dating violence, (D) procedures for parental notification and involvement in the response to incidents of teen dating violence, and (E) uniform reporting procedures for incidents of dating violence.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

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<sup>1</sup> The 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) was completed by 2,405 students in 46 public high schools in Connecticut during the spring of 2013. The school response rate was 85%, the student response rate was 78%, and the overall response rate was 67%. The results are representative of all students in grades 9-12. The complete report can be found at [http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hisr/pdf/cshs\\_ycb2013\\_report.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/hisr/pdf/cshs_ycb2013_report.pdf)