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Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. For the record, my name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

Governor's Bill No. 5052, An Act Strengthening Protection for Victims of Human Trafficking;  
Raised House Bill No. 5621, An Act Concerning Human Trafficking;  
Raised House Bill No. 5623, An Act Concerning Violence Against Women and Victims of Human Trafficking;  
Governor's Bill No. 5054, An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence; and  
Raised Senate Bill No. 429, An Act Concerning Service of Restraining Orders  
Raised House Bill No. 5605, An Act Concerning the Termination of Parental Rights

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) fully supports efforts to improve the delivery of services to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence and human trafficking. The above proposals, many of which are similar in nature, serve to increase protections to victims of domestic and sexual violence and to improve the identification of, treatment and services to victims of human trafficking.

#### Domestic Violence:

It is well known that certain events, including divorce or separation and applications for a restraining order, are often triggers that may cause increased violence to a victim of domestic violence. Particularly when a court issues an ex-parte restraining order, the respondent of the order is not required to surrender, deliver or transfer any firearms in his/her possession until after the scheduled hearing on the restraining order, which is typically 14 days after the issuance of the ex-parte order. That 14 day period can be the most dangerous time for a victim/applicant.

The court, in deciding whether to grant an ex-parte order, must make a finding that the applicant has alleged an immediate and present physical danger. In doing so, the applicant may also indicate whether the respondent possess firearms and/or ammunition. Once the ex-parte order is issued, the applicant must then arrange for service of the order and notice of the scheduled

hearing on the application with a state marshal. This process can often be a barrier for victims when the state marshal is unable to serve the respondent in a timely manner. The above proposals include provisions to improve this process, provide applicants with clear and understandable instruction and allow for the immediate surrender, delivery or transfer of firearms and ammunition when an ex-parte order has been granted. Additionally, in cases where the respondent is employed in a position that requires the respondent to carry a firearm, the court may schedule the hearing as soon as practical, but in no event later than 14 days.

Orders of protection are one of many tools utilized by victims of domestic violence to ensure their safety and the safety of their children. If the victim/applicant has met the threshold to obtain such an order, the victim/applicant should have a reasonable expectation that these efforts will in fact offer enhanced protection.

#### Sexual Violence:

One can only imagine, unless having personally experienced, the impact of sexual violence on a victim/survivor. The courageous victim/survivors who choose to report the assault to the police are often further disillusioned by the lack of prosecution and/or conviction of the perpetrator. When the criminal justice system is ineffective, it not only fails victims/survivors but also puts communities at risk, undermines support for victims and hampers prevention and advocacy efforts. All of this is compounded further when the sexual assault results in a pregnancy.

Currently, in order for a victim/survivor to terminate the parental rights of the perpetrator, the perpetrator must be convicted of the sexual assault. In all other instances for terminating parental rights, the threshold is by clear and convincing evidence, except sexual assault. Victims/survivors and the resulting child should not be burdened by a criminal justice system that is completely out of their control. In addition, a perpetrator should never benefit or be rewarded for committing a sexually violent offense. Victims/survivors should have the ability to terminate parental rights without having to rely on a conviction that may never happen. Finally, the Federal Government, through the Violence Against Women Act, encourages states to adopt a termination of parental rights law, and provides a grant of \$200,000 per year for five years for those states that do. I strongly urge the Committee's favorable report on this proposal.

#### Human Trafficking:

Connecticut is perfectly situated between Boston and New York, which allows for a host of criminal activity, including human trafficking. Connecticut has made some progress over the last few years to identify victims, prevent occurrences and prosecute those who commit human trafficking. However, a significant gap in these efforts is the lack of understanding of the widespread problem of human trafficking and the system's response to victims of human trafficking.

The proposals require establishments that have a high prevalence of human trafficking to maintain computerized records of guest transactions and to train employees to recognize potential victims of human trafficking. Those establishments are in the best position to assist in the detection of human trafficking, and further, to help prevent incidents of human trafficking.

The proposal also challenges the criminal justice system to view victims of human trafficking for what they are—victims. While the proposals differ slightly, the state must be committed to recognizing that, despite the age of the victim, victims of human trafficking should not be prosecuted for the traffickers' crimes. Victims of human trafficking are often drugged, prostituted and beaten on a regular basis. Once rescued, if ever, victims should not face prosecution for being forced into a criminal trade.

The proposals serve to hold offenders accountable; provide tools to the state's attorneys for prosecuting crimes, provide training to professionals and others and require the collection of data to ensure that Connecticut remains at the forefront of addressing the problem of human trafficking. I strongly urge the Committee's favorable report on these important proposals.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.