



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

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 Houses
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

Testimony supporting

SB 426, AA Creating a Task Force to Improve Access to Legal Counsel in Civil Matters
SB 428, AAC Funding for Legal Services for the Poor

Judiciary Committee
March 18, 2016

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Tong 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.

We urge your support of SB 426 and SB 428.

SB 426

This bill creates a task force to examine and make recommendations on different mechanisms to increase legal representation in civil proceedings. Legal representation is one of the most frequently requested services we receive from victims of domestic violence. Many victims experience a number of complex and difficult legal needs including divorce, custody and seeking restraining orders. Those who do not have representation are often further victimized by unfavorable outcomes.

National statistics demonstrate that 98% of abusive relationships include some form of financial abuse in that the abuser controls the victim's access to money. For some victims, even if they work, they are forced to turn their paycheck over to their abuser who is "in charge" of the family's finances. The victim is made to be entirely dependent on their abuser with little or no ability to financially care for themselves or their children. They are often faced with the agonizing decision of staying and dealing with the abuse or leaving and facing possible poverty and homelessness.

While CCADV's 18 member programs provide court-based advocacy and accompaniment in all of the state's criminal courts and 4 of the state's civil/family courts, we are not funded to provide legal representation to victims. It is crucial that victims have access to representation to assist them in addressing relevant legal needs as they seek to end their abusive relationship.

Given the number of domestic violence victims that seek remedies through Connecticut's civil/family court system, we are grateful to have a seat on this task force and the opportunity to participate in this important work. We urge your support.

SB 428

This bill seeks to increase funding for legal services for the poor. It calls for a 3.5% increase to certain court fees (mostly \$5 or \$10 increases) that haven't been raised since 2012 and it gives the Judicial Branch the authority to designate Client Security Fund revenues, when available, to fund these services.

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Legal aid is a key partner in meeting the needs of domestic violence victims across the state. While our 18 member organizations can provide guidance on the court process, they are rarely able to provide legal advice due to funding restrictions. The network of legal aid attorneys, including New Haven Legal Assistance, Greater Hartford Legal Aid and Connecticut Legal Services, is critical to ensuring that victims have the representation they need when seeking remedies through the civil/family court.

As we mentioned above, the state currently only provides funding for Family Violence Victim Advocates in 4 of the states 15 civil/family court locations. Considering just the restraining order application process, which is extremely complex and cumbersome, the services provided by legal aid to assist victims with securing court-ordered protection is invaluable. In addition to those life-saving services, the legal aid network does extensive work with many victims who also have needs related to divorce, custody, alimony, housing, and immigration.

Legal aid is a pivotal piece of the system designed to keep victims of domestic violence safe. Unfortunately, funding for legal aid has been dropping. The Governor and General Assembly, with support from Judicial Branch leadership, enacted court filing fees to stabilize legal aid after IOLTA plummeted from \$20 million to \$2 million. These court fees have helped significantly, but continuing declines in court fee revenue have forced legal aid programs to shrink by around 20%, causing a sharp reduction in urgently needed services. Despite staff layoffs, restructuring of advocacy efforts, unpaid furlough days, attrition and constant fundraising efforts, legal aid programs continue to face projected budget deficits that could result in further cutbacks next year. Any such cutbacks would have a devastating effect on the legal services that victims rely on. We urge your support of remedies that will stabilize funding for legal services.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

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