



Prudence Crandall Center, Inc.

Providing Comprehensive Services for Victims of Domestic Violence Since 1973

**Testimony in Support of
SB 1011, An Act Increasing the Marriage License Fee and Surcharge
Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
March 17, 2017**

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Senator Frantz, Representative Rojas, and members of the Committee. Prudence Crandall Center provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Central Connecticut. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

We urge your support of SB 1011, which will increase revenue to support domestic and sexual violence services provided by community-based nonprofits in Connecticut.

The Marriage License Surcharge (MLS) is a fee paid by those obtaining a marriage license in Connecticut. Since its implementation in 1992, the MLS has not been increased from the current amount of \$20. The surcharge is distributed as follows:

- \$1 is retained by the municipality
- \$19 is deposited into a fund for equal distribution by the Department of Public Health to support sexual violence services and the Department of Social Services to support domestic violence services.

Under this proposal, the MLS will be increased to \$35, which means that \$34 will go directly to support services provided by community-based nonprofits to victims of domestic and sexual violence. Marriages in Connecticut have held steady in recent years with approximately 19,000 marriage licenses obtained per year. This means that annual revenue to help support domestic and sexual violence services could increase to about \$646,000 per year.

Economic and fiscal challenges continue to impact domestic and sexual violence services at both ends - financial supports are being reduced for service providers while victims seeking our help are experiencing more acute, complex problems due to the impact of the economy on their own personal lives. In FY 2016 we served nearly 3,000 people including 179 adults and children in our emergency shelter. On average, victims remained in shelter for 69 days, which caused our shelter to operate at about 154% of capacity throughout the year. With flat or reduced state General Fund dollars available for victim services, we urge your support to increase this alternate source of revenue.

If passed, the total cost for a marriage license in Connecticut would become \$50 (this includes the \$35 MLS and the license fee that is retained entirely by the municipality). This is comparable to surrounding states with statewide marriage license fees, including New Hampshire (\$50 total fee, which includes a \$43 MLS) and Vermont (\$60 total fee, which includes a \$35 MLS). The proposal impacts a limited number of Connecticut residents, including a number of non-residents who choose to get married at any number of premiere wedding venues in the state and therefore obtain a Connecticut marriage license.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barbara Damon', written over a white background.

Barbara Damon

Prudence Crandall Center

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Providing services to New Britain, Berlin, Bristol, Plainville, Southington, Kensington, Plymouth, Burlington & Terryville