



SAFE HAVEN
OF GREATER WATERBURY, INC.

**SB 1011, An Act Increasing the Marriage License Fee and Surcharge
Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee Public Hearing
March 17, 2017**

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Senator Frantz, Representative Rojas, and members of the Committee. My name is Heather Francisco and I am the Adult Advocate at Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury, one of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence's nine community-based member centers. At Safe Haven we offer a **Safe Haven** for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault by providing free, confidential services in a safe, caring environment; striving to raise awareness through community education and outreach. Our support, counseling and advocacy restores hope and helps people reclaim their lives. Safe Haven serves victims in 12 CT towns: Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott, and Woodbury.

We urge your support of SB 1011, which will increase revenue to support sexual and domestic 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 sexual and domestic 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 sexual and domestic violence services could increase to about \$646,000 per year.

Economic and fiscal challenges continue to impact sexual and domestic 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. 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

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

Sincerely,

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