



DATE: Friday, March 17, 2017

TO: Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee

FROM: Jeff Shaw, Director of Public Policy, The Alliance

RE: S.B. 1011, An Act Increasing The Marriage License Fee And Surcharge.

Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Senator Frantz, Representative Rojas, Representative Davis and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee:

My name is Jeff Shaw, Director of Public Policy at The Alliance. The Alliance is Connecticut's statewide association of community nonprofits, which serve over 500,000 people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut's workforce.

We are here to testify in support of S.B. 1011, An Act Increasing The Marriage License Fee And Surcharge, which would increase revenue to support domestic and sexual violence services provided by community-based nonprofits in Connecticut.

Several domestic and sexual violence service providers are members of The Alliance. These community-based nonprofits provide life-saving services to victims of domestic and sexual violence including counseling, support groups, safety planning, victim accompaniment in police and medical settings, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

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

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lives. In FY 2016 the state's domestic violence shelters ran at an average capacity of 125% with the average length of time that a victim stays in shelter increasing to 46 days – a 77% increase in the past 8 years. 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.

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