

**Testimony of Quentin Ball, Executive Director
The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education
In Support of S.B. 17 *AN ACT PROMOTING FAIRNESS IN ACCESS TO INFORMATION, SUPPORT
AND JUSTICE FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS***

**Public Safety and Security Committee
Tuesday, February 27, 2018**

Good afternoon, Senator Larson, Senator Guglielmo, Representative Verrengia and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee.

As the Executive Director of The Center, I oversee an organization that provides advocacy, counseling and prevention education in the eight towns of Lower Fairfield County including Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Stamford, Weston, Westport and Wilton. We are one of nine member centers of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence

Our organization has been providing advocates to support victims of sexual assault since 1979. In fact, we started our organization behind Stamford Hospital for exactly that reason – to provide sexual assault victims with the emotional and advocacy support they need during their darkest moments. Having an advocate in the hospital can mean so much to a survivor in the short and long term. Recently I accompanied a victim to a local hospital where I was able to provide emotional support and educate her and about the forensic exam, police report and counseling services. She said, as we were leaving the hospital, “I never would have survived being here without you.” Advocacy support services are really *that* critical in crisis.

Our relationships with the local hospitals we partner with are very positive. Most of the time we are called when there is a victim of sexual assault as the hospital sees the benefits to the patient in having us there. However, high nurse turnover at the hospitals means that nurses are not always aware of our services and don't know to call us to send an advocate. Without an advocate, victims don't always know their options with regards to forensic kits (eg, that they can have them done anonymously) nor do they always understand their options with regards to police reporting. They are scared, tired, upset, traumatized, and unsure. Additionally, without an advocate victims aren't often aware of the free counseling services that we provide and without counseling, the trauma can cause long-term psychological and physical symptoms such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and sleeplessness.

As the millions of #MeToo stories have illustrated, victims of rape face significant barriers to disclosing or reporting an assault. Many fear they will not be believed and experience undue shame, blame and guilt as well as threats from the offender or the offenders friends and family. Survivors who brave coming forward in the aftermath of a significant trauma to undergo an invasive exam, deserve to have non-judgmental and compassionate support, an assurance that their kit will be tested and access to information about their case and the results of the testing.

Providing this is a simple matter of justice for sexual assault victims and a matter of public safety.

Connecticut has already established itself as a leader in coordinating a multidisciplinary response in the collection of evidence through the development of evidence collection guidelines, the state Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program, as well as clear timeframes for the transfer and testing of all kits. We were the first state in the country to voluntarily survey all law enforcement agencies to identify previously untested sexual assault kits, and have secured federal grants to test them. We must take these next steps to ensure that we are doing everything we can to support survivors and apprehend offenders.

Thank you for your consideration.
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