

**Testimony of Michelle Marone-Pillsbury, Program Director
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**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.

My name is Michelle Marone-Pillsbury. I am the Program Director at Susan B. Anthony Project serving sexual assault survivors in 18 towns and 2 cities of northwest Connecticut. We are one of nine member centers of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony in support of S.B. 17 *AN ACT PROMOTING FAIRNESS IN ACCESS TO INFORMATION, SUPPORT AND JUSTICE FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT VICTIMS*.

We support all provisions of this bill. I would like to highlight the bill's provision which upholds the current and recognized best practice of ensuring that victims have access to a SA counselor at the hospital.

Providing a victim access to a certified sexual assault victim advocate when they arrive at the hospital for a forensic exam is an essential first step in their long journey toward healing from sexual violence. Certified sexual assault victim advocates are available 24 hours a day and provide confidential counseling and support, information and options, and serve as a bridge to additional community services as well as support through the criminal justice systems. Sexual assault victim advocates provide support through the entire process of the very invasive and further traumatizing forensic exam, which at times can take up to 10 hours.

In our service area we do not have the benefit of the State of Connecticut, Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services Gail Burns-Smith Sexual Assault Forensic program, so it can be hit or miss if the ER department calls our agency for a sexual assault advocate when a victim arrives for a forensic exam. Sometimes clients are told about our agency's services after the exam is completed. Other times, an advocate is called, but after the exam has started. Even then, the advocate is asked to wait in the lobby

until the forensic exam is over. This is not helpful to the victim. While we continue to reach out to hospital supervisors because of staff turnover, the inconsistency continues. Victims report feeling more supported when an advocate from Susan B. Anthony Project is in the room with them.

This legislation will require the commission to develop policies and procedures to ensure that victims have information regarding their kits. Victims often feel victimized when they call for information regarding their kits and are given no definitive information. They feel dejected and lose faith in the system. It is extremely difficult to share this personal violation with so many individuals as many times victims are not believed.

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 compassionate and non-judgmental support, an assurance that their kit will be tested, and access to the information about their case and the results of the testing.

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

I support all provisions of this bill and would like to highlight the bills provision which upholds the current and recognized best practice of ensuring that victims have access to a SA counselor at the hospital.

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 transfer and testing of 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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