

Testimony of Shelagh P. McClure
Before the Public Safety and Security Committee
February 27, 2018

I am Chairperson of the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities. Our Council is made up of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD), family members of people with I/DD, and representatives of state and nonprofit agencies that support and serve people with I/DD.

I am here to testify on Governor's Bill 17, *An Act Promoting Fairness in Access to Information, Support and Justice for Sexual Assault Victims*. We believe this bill promotes an important purpose for victims of sexual assault, which is developing guidelines for access to the results of sexual assault test kits. My concern is that the Commission, which is going to develop the guidelines, lacks representation from an important group of sexual assault victims—people with I/DD.

Some of you may have heard the recent National Public Radio series *The Sex Assault Epidemic NoOne Talks About*. This multi-part series cited many disturbing facts in the victimization of people with I/DD, including a previously unpublished United States Department of Justice statistic that people with I/DD are **7 times more likely to be victims of sexual assault** than their non-disabled peers.

As the series goes on to highlight, people with I/DD are often victimized by people they have been told they can trust. Their life experience discourages them from reporting abuse because they are often not believed. Then there is the issue of communicating the abuse. Some people with I/DD may have communication difficulties or may be non-verbal, making proving sexual assault cases difficult even when the assault is reported.

The materials developed by the Commission already recognize people with I/DD as requiring specialized procedures. We believe a permanent representative on the Commission would be appropriate to ensure that the interests of this population are well-protected, just as was recognized with the appointment of the current representatives for children and seniors.

Our suggestion is the addition of the director of Disability Rights Connecticut (DRCT), the state's disability rights organization appointed by the Governor as the replacement for the Office of Protection and Advocacy for People with Disabilities (OPA), or her designee. Representation on this Commission would fit squarely into the mandate of DRCT: to provide protection of the rights of individuals with I/DD through legally based advocacy, and to investigate abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, sexual abuse makes up a portion of the abuse cases DRCT, and previously OPA, are familiar with, but this will make their Director a good representative on the Commission.

We urge you to consider amending Governor's Bill 17 to ensure that people with I/DD are represented on this Commission.