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**Testimony of Angela Schlingheyde, JD  
Director of Legal & Court Advocacy Services  
The Center for Family Justice, Inc.**

**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 Committee. My name is Angela Schlingheyde, and I am the Director of Legal & Court Advocacy services at The Center for Family Justice in Bridgeport, Connecticut. We are a member agency of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS). The Center for Family Justice, provides life-saving services which include 24/7 Crisis Hotline and Safe House, Civil and Criminal Court Advocacy, Community Education and Prevention, Domestic Violence Advocacy, Sexual Violence Advocacy, Legal Services, and a Multidisciplinary Investigative Team for children who disclose sexual assault. We serve victims in the towns of Bridgeport, Fairfield, Easton, Stratford, Monroe, and Trumbull.

I am here today to testify in support of S.B. 17. As the national media shines a spotlight on sexual violence in our country, those of us working in victim services are seeing a significant increase in sexual violence survivors coming forward to seek help. At The Center for Family Justice, we have seen a 53% increase in services for sexual assault victims and a 57% increase in calls to our Sexual Violence crisis hotline. Victims of rape are overcoming significant barriers to report their assaults and it is essential to have support services in place, as well as someone to inform them of their rights.

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To illustrate how essential it is to implement the best practices outlined in S.B. 17, I would like share with you the story of a survivor we will refer to as Jane. Jane arrived at the hospital after having been sexually assaulted. She is a nurse, so she understood what steps needed to be taken. But she could not think beyond that first step of getting herself to the ER. She could not stop crying. She could not cope with the magnitude of what had been done to her. She could not put her thoughts together in a way that made sense. Thankfully, in this instance, the hospital staff contacted CFJ and a certified sexual assault advocate was sent to meet Jane at the hospital.

The advocate stayed with Jane throughout every step of the intake process and sexual assault kit exam. She provided Jane with emotional support, held her hand, got her food when she was hungry, and helped her communicate the necessary information to the SAFE nurse; including the fact that Jane needed to take occasional breaks throughout the exam in order to collect herself. The advocate ensured that Jane had everything she needed emotionally and physically during the hours and hours it took to complete the forensic exam.

Additionally, the advocate's presence ensured that the SAFE nurse could perform her job and collect the necessary evidence that would assist law enforcement in apprehending the offender. Because the advocate was there doing her job, the SAFE nurse was able to do the job she was trained to do: collect evidence through a medical examination.

After the examination was complete, the advocate made sure Jane had the name and number of the

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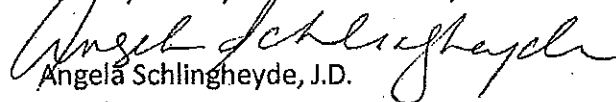
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Detective assigned to her case. When several weeks had passed, and Jane was not able to get information regarding her rape kit, she knew exactly who to call and ask for help – her advocate. The relationship already existed and her advocate was there to help.

CFJ works collaboratively with our area hospitals and has a long standing history of responding to victims of rape who go to the ER after an assault. However, when there is not a consistent policy or mandate in place, there are many challenges that exist in upholding best practices. When hospitals merge, or there is a great deal of turnover in ER staff, there is an uncertainty about who to call and how to get help for victims. This bill would provide consistent best policies for victims throughout the state, and ensure that victims who come forward in the aftermath of significant trauma have the non-judgmental and compassionate support they deserve, as well as the tools to follow up and access information about their kit and any potential test results.

Over the last few years, Connecticut has established itself a leader when it comes to upholding the rights of victims of rape. We have established clear timeframes for the transfer and testing of all kits, the state Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner program, and evidence collection guidelines. S.B. 17 is the next step in ensuring that we provide justice to all sexual assault victims, as well as protect the safety of our communities by apprehending offenders.

Thank you for your consideration,

  
Angela Schlingheyde, J.D.

203-993-8127

aschlingheyde@centerforfamilyjustice.org

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