Testimony Regarding

HB 7148, AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor

Office of Policy & Management

Appropriations Committee

February 28, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Lesser, Representative Baker and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state’s leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We urge you to protect funding included in the Governor’s budget for Justice Assistance Grants under the Office of Policy & Management (OPM) budget, which partially funds domestic violence services. OPM currently provides approximately $164,375 in state match funds that leverage an additional $493,125 in federal funding to support a variety of services that improve outcomes for survivors of domestic violence throughout the state. Any reductions to the state match funding will result in fewer federal dollars coming into the state to support survivors.

Domestic violence services supported by OPM state match dollars include:

- **Meeting the needs of underserved victims** – over the past year we have worked to begin streamlining multiple points of contact and evolving services in a way that makes them more accessible and meets the needs of a diverse population. This includes efforts specific to immigrant populations and creating points of entry by meeting the civil legal needs (e.g. U Visas, housing, benefits, etc.) of immigrants.

- **Domestic Violence Victim Advocates who work with children** – domestic violence organizations receive partial funding to support advocates that worked with over 4,700 children statewide in FY2018 to build resiliency and address their emotional/social well-being as they seek to overcome the abuse in their home.

- **Law enforcement and victim advocacy** – this funding helps support the state’s Lethality Assessment Program (LAP), including ongoing training and technical assistance for law enforcement and advocates across the state. We also worked over the past year to better understand Connecticut’s 30 year challenge with dual arrest in domestic violence situations, as well as develop a language access plan for use by police officers who come into contact with individuals for whom English is a second language. This has helped to minimize service barriers for this population.

- **Training for law enforcement** – this funding supports cooperative efforts between CCADV and the Connecticut Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POSTC) to provide comprehensive, up-to-date training to law enforcement on best practices for responding to domestic violence. This past year we worked diligently to train officers on the new dominant aggressor provision to the state’s family violence arrest law.

Funding reductions under OPM could result in the elimination of some or all of these services decreasing survivor safety and access to services.

(OVER)
FY2018 statewide domestic violence service statistics and current service challenges:

In fiscal year 2018, **over 38,000 victims of domestic violence** sought help at one of CCADV’s 18 member organizations. Some of the ongoing challenges that continue to put pressure on the state’s domestic violence service system include the host of complex needs that survivors face when entering services, ranging from severe financial abuse and a complete lack of access to monetary resources, to serious medical conditions or behavioral health needs. All of these challenges require additional supports from the domestic violence provider. Fewer recovery options and a lack of affordable housing continue to present obstacles that are growing increasingly difficult to overcome in a timely manner resulting in longer shelter stays and overflow.

Here is a quick snapshot of our statewide service statistics for fiscal year 2018:

**Housing:**
- Access to safe, affordable housing remains one of the greatest needs facing survivors and their children.
- In FY18, **23% of advocates' time was spent on housing-related advocacy** with or on behalf of victims. This includes assisting with their access to various programs that support housing, securing affordable housing or dealing with issues such as eviction.

**Emergency Shelter:**
- **2,055 victims, including over 900 children, were housed in shelter.** The average age of kids in shelter was 6 years old.
- Shelters operated at **123% capacity**, meaning they were over capacity throughout the year. This is a 1% increase from FY17.
- The **average length of stay in shelter was 47.5 days**, which was an **8% increase** from FY17.

**Transitional Living & Supportive Housing:**
- **192 victims, including 112 children, housed.**
- Transitional Living Programs (TLP) are an important piece of housing survivors as they provide affordable housing while maintaining a consistent connection for the survivor with the local domestic violence organization. Many survivors in of housing assistance are facing poverty and TLP provides a means for them to achieve economic stability, which in turn increases safety.

**Court-based Advocacy:**
- **32,550 victims** received court-based services, which includes assistance with both criminal civil/family matters. Total service requests **decreased by 1%** from FY17.

**Hotline:**
- There were **33,625 calls** to the statewide hotline, a **3% increase** from FY17.

**One-on-One Counseling:**
- **31,567 victims** received one-on-one counseling, which includes safety planning, assistance with obtaining basic needs, and general advocacy. This service **increased 7%** from FY17.

**Support Groups/Group Counseling:**
- **1,854 support group sessions** were held, a **13% increase** from FY17.

**Funding to Support Minimum Wage Increase for State-Contracted Nonprofits**

We also urge you to maintain funding in the Governor’s budget proposal for state-contracted nonprofit providers to accommodate the proposed increase in the minimum wage. CCADV supports a much-needed increase in the minimum wage that will certainly benefit survivors, some of whom may have been prevented by their abusers from working and later must join the workforce in entry-level positions. But we also must be cognizant that our 18 member organizations provide critical services to survivors on behalf of the state through state contracts. It is therefore necessary that the funding for those services be increased to keep pace with the minimum wage through its increase to $15 an hour and beyond if the state chooses to index the minimum wage beginning in 2023.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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