Testimony of Angela Schlingheyde, JD
Director of Legal & Court Advocacy Services
The Center for Family Justice, Inc.
Regarding H.B. 7148 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium
Ending June 30, 2021
Department of Public Health - Rape Crisis Intervention and Prevention Services
Appropriations Committee
Friday, March 1, 2019

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our testimony and for your history of supporting those who work every day with child, adolescent and adult victims of sexual violence.

We understand and respect the current fiscal reality and budget constraints that the state faces, as well as the difficult choices that are before you. The Governor’s budget recognizes the continued need for front line sexual assault crisis services and programs in our state. We ask that as you work to uphold the state’s longstanding commitment to its residents to address sexual violence that you keep the level of funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services.

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 and survivors of rape are coming forward after years of silence and it is essential to have support services in place. As we seek to change the culture in our nation surrounding issues of sexual violence we need to be committed to investing in these programs. I would like to share the story of one such brave survivor so that you can understand how critical it is to ensure that these services remain intact.

KC came to CFJ after enduring a horrific sexual assault. One evening, in early 2017, KC was on the public bus heading home when his life was forever changed. Upon getting off the bus at his stop, KC was hit over the head by a man who intended to rob him of his money and cell phone. However, the offender decided that he wanted more. He asked KC if he is a man or a woman and then forced KC to perform oral sex on him. Afterwards, the offender attempted to forcibly penetrate KC, but thankfully, KC was able to kick the offender in the genitals and get away.

As with many survivors of sexual assault, when KC came to CFJ, he blamed himself for the attack, felt immense shame, and was dealing with severe trauma. KC felt that he was targeted because he is a transgender male, and the fact that he is also autistic, added additional challenges to his recovery process. He was completely overwhelmed and not sure if he would ever be whole again.

KC was referred to CFJ for services, and somehow found the courage to seek help. He was immediately assigned to an advocate who is specifically trained in supporting sexual violence survivors. This advocate was able to provide KC with emotional support and counseling as he dealt with the trauma of his sexual assault. Additionally, KC was connected with a case manager who specializes in working with the LGBTQ community to ensure that as a transgender male, he had all the proper supports in place. Finally, KC was connected to attorneys through the Victim Rights Center of CT who advocated for him during the criminal investigation, arrest of the offender, as well as the judicial process. The victim rights attorneys were able to give KC a voice and due to their advocacy, the prosecutor charged the offender with a hate crime, in addition to the sexual assault charges.

As a result of these services, KC feels supported and empowered. He no
longer feels defined by the sexual assault and this would not have been possible without the essential services provided by the sexual assault advocates. KC reached out for help and CFJ was there to provide him with the wrap around services he so desperately needed.

KC represents only one of thousands of victims and survivors of rape in Connecticut. It is our obligation and duty to provide them with the critical services they need: 24/7 hotlines, support during sexual assault forensic kit examinations, counseling, support groups, college campus advocacy and prevention education.

Our budgets continue to shrink and services continue to diminish due to lack of resources. Please continue to support these critical services for victims and survivors of rape and child sexual abuse by keeping the funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services at nothing less than level funding.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Angela Schlingheyde, J.D.
203-993-8127
aschlingheyde@centerforfamilyjustice.org