Testimony of Heather Francisco
Adult Advocate
Appropriations Committee

HB 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIOUMENDING JUNE THIRTEENTH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREAFTER.

Department of Public Health – Rape Crisis Intervention and Prevention Services
March 1, 2019

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walked and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Heather Francisco, and I am an Adult Advocate at Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury. Our agency is one of nine community based sexual assault crisis programs in the State of Connecticut. We are a member of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. Safe Haven provides supportive services to survivors of sexual violence residing in Bethlehem, Beacon Falls, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury.

Safe Haven receives funds from the Department of Public Health. These funds assist us in providing services to survivors of sexual assault. We provide a 24 hour hotline with a crisis response team, hospital accompaniment, counseling, advocacy, and community education. Safe Haven practices a holistic, trauma informed, evidence based approach that works to provide clients with a chance to rebuild after trauma and reclaim their power following an assault. Our advocates are skilled and dedicated crisis interventionists who aim to help facilitate social change one client at a time. If you have experienced sexual violence, we believe you.

Individuals who experience sexual assault are traumatized and often left with unimaginable burden. Imagine, for a moment, having been sexually assaulted and trying to navigate unfamiliar systems with nurses, doctors, police, detectives, scientists, lawyers, and judges. Now imagine having to do that alone.....it is often a struggle for people to process a traumatic experience much less navigate the complexities of the medical and legal systems. These individuals rely on the sexual assault crisis services we provide to assist them through the process. Often people find themselves isolated from natural supports due to physical distance, shame, abuse, or for a variety of other reasons. While the afore mentioned individuals are incredibly vulnerable even those who have natural supports benefit from our services because of our knowledge and experience navigating the systems described above.

While we understand that funds are tight, the need for sexual assault intervention services is in more demand than ever before. People are coming forward and speaking about their experiences and this leads to healing. Having access to services can be a determining factor for survivors. I was recently asked
by a legislator about the increase in calls to our hotline and what my thoughts were regarding this increase. I replied that I am inspired and motivated by the increase in calls. People have always faced struggles and rape is not a new concept. I am proud to say seeking support and feeling empowered to speak out against sexual violence is a movement; and as that movement continues to gain momentum, we will be here to support the brave survivors who call or come in for services. For this I am grateful because it indicates to me that fewer people are suffering alone in silence. We must maintain our funding to be able to keep up with the increased demand. We do so much with so little to cut anything from our budget would surely have a negative impact on our ability to provide comprehensive services. This would be a disservice to the vulnerable population we serve.

Thank you for your time and attention. I implore the committee to maintain our funding at the level proposed by Governor Lemont. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Thank you again,

Heather Francisco

Adult Advocate – Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury

hfrancisco@safehavenofgw.org

203.753.3613