Testimony of Lee R. Schlesinger
Executive Director

Appropriations Committee
HB 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.
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 Lee Schlesinger, and I am the Executive Director at Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury. Safe Haven is one of four dual programs in the state, providing services to victims/survivors of both sexual violence as well as domestic violence. We offer a Safe Haven for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault by providing free, confidential services in a safe, caring environment; striving to raise awareness through community education and outreach. Our support, counseling and advocacy restores hope and helps people reclaim their lives.

We receive funds from the Department of Public Health that assists us to help meet the needs of our clients in the form of 24-hour crisis intervention, counseling, support, legal advocacy for both criminal and civil matters, advocacy for housing or job training, counseling for child victims/survivors and community education and prevention presentations. We serve victims/survivors and their children in the towns of Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury.

Recently we helped a young female client who was being sexually abused by her mother’s fiancé over a period of several years. She was once an energetic young girl, doing all the things a child of her age should do. Her family and friends noticed that she was withdrawing and becoming more and more reclusive. She stopped her after school activities, did not spend any time with her friends and began to lose weight from not eating. Her mother finally asked her what was wrong? Why the changes in her behavior? The young girl got up the courage to tell her mother what was happening. Mom immediately called our hotline seeking advice on how to proceed. Our advocate was able to help mom and her daughter navigate through the process of making a police report, followed by the legal process through the court system. Both mom and daughter began to see counselor/advocates at our office weekly. The abuser was arrested and sentenced to time in jail for his crime. Our advocate was there with her every step of the way; including supporting her in court when she read her victim impact statement to the judge at the sentencing hearing. This young lady is on her way to reclaiming her life and moving forward. She encourages other children and adults as well to break their silence and break free from their abuse. In her words, “You take your life and power back once you break your silence. You get strength and, with the right support systems, you can thrive. I could not have done this without the support of my counselor at Safe Haven.”
While we understand that funds are tight, the need for sexual assault invention services is in more demand than ever. **We respectfully urge you to keep the funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services at nothing less than level funding.**

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Thank you.

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