Testimony of Ann Rodwell-Lawton, Director of Education, Training, and Outreach
Women’s Center of Greater Danbury

Appropriations Committee
HB 7148 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUMENDING
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 Ann Rodwell-Lawton and I am the Legislative Liaison and Director of Education, Training, and Outreach at the Women’s Center of Greater Danbury. We are one of the nine community-based member centers of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. We receive funds from the Department of Public Health that allow us to provide free and confidential services to victims of sexual assault in upper Fairfield and lower Litchfield county areas.

In fiscal year 2018, the Women’s Center provided life-changing services to over 978 victims and survivors of sexual assault in our service area. This includes answering over 843 sexual assault crisis hotline calls, and accompanying over 131 victims of sexual assault to our local hospitals. Our services include individual counseling, safety planning, court advocacy, hospital advocacy, support groups, crisis intervention through two 24-hour hotlines, and educational and primary prevention programs. We serve victims in 13 towns in the Greater Danbury area including Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, and Washington.

While we understand that funds are tight, the need for sexual assault intervention services is in more demand than ever. **We urge you to keep the funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services at nothing less than level funding. Now is not the time to cut services for survivors of sexual assault.**

Sexual assault does not discriminate. Therefore, our services are available for everyone – males, females, gender nonconforming individuals, adults and children, and individuals from all socio-economic classes and backgrounds. Services are also provided to secondary victims (e.g., spouses, partners, family members). In fact, 33.1% of our sexual assault clients are young adults under the age of 24, and 56.6% are individuals of color. Often, these populations do not seek services due to shame, guilt, feelings of helplessness, and lack of knowledge that services are available to them.

Often, our services are life-saving and life-changing. Funds from the Department of Public Health allow us to meet victims’ needs and allow us to provide a wide range of services, which are often connected. For example, one of our advocates received a call on our 24-hour sexual assault hotline in the early morning hours. A local hospital was calling to inform the advocate that a 13-year-old female victim of sexual assault was currently in the emergency department. As is protocol, the
hospital was calling so an advocate could meet the victim and support them during this scary and difficult time.

When our advocate arrived at the hospital, they were empathetic and comforted the victim and the family, while also educating them on available resources. Over the two hours our advocate spent with this family in the emergency department, the victim disclosed that the mother's live-in boyfriend of many years had assaulted her many times while the mother was not home. Feeling shame and guilt, as many victims of child sexual assault do, this 13-year-old kept this horrifying secret to herself for many years.

This brave young girl finally decided to come forward and disclose the abuse after seeing one of our educational programs at her middle school. She said our educational programs gave her the courage and knowledge to step forward, knowing that she would be helped and believed.

Our educational programs don't just educate young adults on our issues, but they also serve as a way for young adults to connect to our services and know that there is a place they can go if they are ever in need of support. Our advocacy at local hospitals assures that victims know all their options and can get connected to our services. Our medical advocacy provides victims with an individual whose sole job is to advocate for their needs and wants, with no other agenda.

Funding for rape crisis programs is essential for community based sexual assault crisis programs to provide crisis intervention and advocacy services to thousands of children, adolescents, and adult victims of sexual assault in Connecticut. Please continue to support these critical services for victims and survivors of rape and child sexual abuse by keeping the level of funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services in the Governor’s budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions about the importance of full funding for rape crisis services.

Sincerely,
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