Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Carissa Conway and I am the Director of Prevention & Intervention Services at Women and Families Center (WFC). WFC is committed to promoting equity and improving quality of life through services that foster empowerment and independence. We serve individuals living or working in Meriden, Wallingford, Cheshire, Middlesex County and Greater New Haven.

We receive funds from the Department of Public Health that supports the provision of services offered through the Sexual Assault Crisis Services. Services of the center include 24-hour crisis hotline in English and Spanish, short term supportive counseling, accompaniment and advocacy, systems’ advocacy and information and referral services.

WFC staff met Mary and her family at Middlesex Hospital. Mary was sexually assaulted by a fellow student at the high school she attended. Kayla, a WFC SACS advocate was present to provide Mary information and support as she completed an evidence collection kit and examination. During this time, Mary talked about her feelings of shame and blame and expressed her desire to file a police report. Kayla provided Mary and her family with information about Victim Compensation. We let Mary and her family know that we would follow up the next day. The following day, Kayla received a call from Mary’s mother, Lisa. Lisa could not thank her enough for being there for her daughter, and expressed that her daughter does not normally open up to people like she did with Kayla. Lisa said Mary has such severe anxiety that affects many aspects of her life including mostly socializing with individuals that are not a part of her immediate family. Lisa expressed that Mary's assault has impacted the whole family. Kayla connected Lisa and her other daughter, Kelsey with other counselors in our office. They all received ongoing services separately for several months as they were overwhelmed, experiencing insomnia and anxiety each for different reasons. Both Lisa and Kelsey expressed feelings of because they weren't able to protect Mary. The counselors worked with each of them and helping them to focus on using coping skills such as meditating, crocheting, journaling, and using essential oils.

Our advocates connected the family with an attorney from the Victims Rights Center of Connecticut. The attorney would help to ensure that Mary's rights as a student were protected and help her navigate through the criminal justice system. Mary and her family have said, "We don't know we would have done if we didn't have your guidance and expertise to get us through this."

While we understand that funds are tight, the need for sexual assault invention 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.**

Thank you.