Testimony Regarding

HB 7148, AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021, and Making Appropriations Therefor

Department of Social Services Budget

Appropriations Committee
March 5, 2019

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state’s leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We urge you maintain funding for domestic violence shelter services under the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget as proposed in the Governor’s budget, which included a small increase of $42,000.

Current financial realities of domestic violence services:

In fiscal year 2018, over 38,000 victims of domestic violence sought help at one of CCADV’s 18 member organizations. Some of the ongoing challenges that continue to put pressure on the state’s domestic violence service system include the host of complex needs that survivors face when entering services, ranging from severe financial abuse and a complete lack of access to monetary resources, to serious medical conditions or behavioral health needs. All of these challenges require additional supports from the domestic violence provider. Fewer recovery options and a lack of affordable housing continue to present obstacles that are growing increasingly difficult to overcome in a timely manner resulting in longer shelter stays and overflow.

All of this impacts funding under DSS, which largely covers shelter and some transitional living options for survivors. In FY18, 2,055 victims, including over 900 children, were housed in emergency shelter. The average age of kids in shelter was 6 years old. Shelters operated at 123% capacity, meaning they were over capacity throughout the year (a 1% increase from the prior year). The average length of stay in shelter was 47.5 days, which was an 8% increase from the prior year. Longer stays have contributed to the overall capacity challenges.

Beyond shelter, 192 victims, including 112 children, resided in domestic violence transitional living or supportive housing programs in FY18. Transitional Living Programs (TLP) are an important piece of housing survivors as they provide affordable housing while maintaining a consistent connection for the survivor with the local domestic violence organization. Many survivors in of housing assistance are facing poverty and TLP provides a means for them to achieve economic stability, which in turn increases safety.

Access to safe, affordable housing remains one of the greatest needs facing survivors and their children. In FY18, 23% of advocates’ time was spent on housing-related advocacy with or on behalf of victims. This includes assisting with their access to various programs that support housing, securing affordable housing or dealing with issues such as eviction.

(OVER)
Here is a quick snapshot of our fiscal year 2018 statewide statistics for a few other domestic violence services:

**Court-based Advocacy:**
- **32,550 victims** received court-based services, which includes assistance with both criminal civil/family matters. Total service requests **decreased by 1%** from FY17.

**Hotline:**
- There were **33,625 calls** to the statewide hotline, a **3% increase** from FY17.

**One-on-One Counseling:**
- **31,567 victims** received one-on-one counseling, which includes safety planning, assistance with obtaining basic needs, and general advocacy. This service **increased 7%** from FY17.

**Support Groups/Group Counseling:**
- **1,854 support group sessions** were held, a **13% increase** from FY17.

**Community Education & Prevention:**
- **4,126 events** were either sponsored or attended to provide education or promote awareness. This was a **23% increase** from FY17.

Overall, given the existing pressure on domestic violence services statewide following years of flat or reduced funding, we ask that you please support the Governor’s proposal and prevent any reductions to funding for these critical services. Funding reductions would limit comprehensive services for victims that will ultimately have a negative impact on their long-term safety and stability, as well as that of their children.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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