Anne Malisk, Director of Sexual Assault Crisis Services
Women and Families Center

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
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My name is Anne Malisk, and I am the Director of Sexual Assault Crisis Services at Women and Families Center (WFC). We are a sexual assault crisis services center in central Connecticut that provides confidential, free counseling, and advocacy services for victims of sexual violence. We have offices in Meriden, New Haven, Middletown, and Guilford and serve 28 towns in central Connecticut. We provide a 24-hour hotline, hospital, police and court accompaniment, one-on-one counseling, support groups and free prevention education open to all school districts within the 28 towns we serve along with other needed services for sexual assault victims. I am writing in **support** of the provision in. **H.B. No. 6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025** to enhance funding for victim service providers.

This funding provision is a direct result of the devastating loss of Victim of Crimes Act (VOCA) funds that support our work providing comprehensive, no-cost and trauma-informed services to victims of sexual violence. VOCA funds, which are generated from federal criminal fines and fees, are at an all-time low due to fines being redirected to the General Treasury under the previous administration. While the current administration signed the "VOCA Fix" bill in 2021 to correct this issue, VOCA funds have continued to lag and are not expected to reach previous funding amounts.

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to include a $13.175 million allocation to the Judicial Branch to supplement the lack of federal VOCA funds in Connecticut. These funds ensure victims have access to critical support, counseling, advocacy, and help to navigate the complex criminal justice system. Women and Families Center (WFC) Sexual Assault Crisis Services (SACS) receives pass through VOCA funding as a member of The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence and would not be able to continue to provide these unique and vital services without the VOCA budget allocation. The services provided by WFC includes six hospitals in our catchment area where we respond every time the hospital has a victim of sexual assault. We always have at least 3 advocates available on every shift 24-hours per day, 7 days per week. The advocate who receives the call through the hotline goes to the hospital to support the victim throughout their entire forensic medical exam. At that point, the advocate also provides all the resources that person needs moving forward along with follow up services as needed.

One example of how funding has helped a victim of sexual assault through multiple systems was when an advocate supported a victim during a hospital accompaniment who was sexually assaulted by her boyfriend. During the sexual assault exam, she revealed that she was afraid for her safety because he also had a key to her apartment. With the VOCA funding we received we were able to place the victim

in a safe location for a few days while we provided support with the restraining order process. Once the offender was served the restraining order, the victim felt safe to go home with some safety planning that was provided by the advocate. The victim also continued to work with the advocate for one-on-one counseling and support along with referrals to other community services to help the client continue to move forward and have the supports she needed throughout the process. The client was so grateful for the help of her advocate, and stated that she felt the advocate really enabled her to move forward during a time when she had no idea what to do or where to turn. All this would be impossible for Women and Families Center to provide without the help of VOCA funding.

I urge you to support the Governor's proposed use of funds to ensure that the loss of VOCA funds does not harm victims and survivors of sexual violence in our state who will not be able to receive the services we provide anywhere else. Support and access to services are critical for survivors to heal and to mitigate further harm to individuals and communities. This funding is necessary so sexual assault advocates can continue to empower victims and provide a safe place where a victim never needs to feel alone after experiencing one of the most traumatic experiences of their life. We are not asking for any additional funding, we are asking for your support to help maintain our funding at a stable level after agencies in Connecticut lost some of the funding from VOCA.

Thank you for your support of victims and survivors of sexual violence in Connecticut.

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