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**S.B. 295 An Act Concerning State Law Protections for Health Care Providers and Patients Related to the Provision of a Legally Protected Health Care Activity – In Support**

**H.B. 5306 An Act Concerning Sentence Reduction or Relief for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking or Human Trafficking- In Support**

**H.B. 5309 An Act Concerning the Provision of Notice to a Parent or Guardian of a Minor Child Who Seeks to Receive Pregnancy-Related Health Care Services- In Opposition**

Hello Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and members of the Connecticut General Assembly's Judiciary Committee,

My name is Tonishia Signore, and I am the Policy Director at She Leads Justice (SLJ), a statewide nonprofit that uses a justice and equity lens to advocate for under-resourced and marginalized women and girls in Connecticut. For over fifty years, we have been a leading advocate for policy solutions to enhance women's economic security, combat discrimination, and increase gender equity. I am submitting this testimony in strong support of S.B. 295 and H.B. 5306, and in opposition to H.B. 5309.

#### **S.B. 295**

SLJ voices our strong support for **S.B. 295, An Act Concerning State Law Protections for Health Care Providers and Patients Related to the Provision of a Legally Protected Health Care Activity**. This bill further broadens Connecticut's shield law by offering an additional layer of protections to healthcare providers who are able to provide legally protected care, including abortion and necessary care for transgender young people, via telemedicine to out-of-state patients. The bill represents a commitment to fulfill the promise the state has made to expand and protect access to safe and compassionate abortion care and essential, age-appropriate medical care for transgender people in Connecticut.

Technology continues to evolve, and healthcare is evolving alongside it. Telehealth allows patients to communicate with licensed providers via video, messaging, chat, text, or email to monitor their progress remotely. Telehealth care use has risen exponentially since the COVID-19 pandemic,<sup>1</sup> and a growing number of primary, mental health, and reproductive health care providers are utilizing telehealth to provide safe and effective care to their patients, regardless of zip code.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12897674/>

SLJ believes every person should be able to make their own decisions about their bodies, their health, and their futures and access the care they need to live happy, fulfilled lives, free from interference from politicians. When Connecticut passed the first shield law in the country, they were making a statement, but also a promise; to protect patients and providers from the overreach of out-of-state actors. We must renew our pledge to all patients, regardless of their zip code, so Connecticut can remain a beacon of hope and light for them.

### **H.B. 5306 An Act Concerning Sentence Reduction or Relief for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking or Human Trafficking**

We would also like to voice our strong support for H.B. 5306 An Act Concerning Sentence Reduction or Relief for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking or Human Trafficking, also known as the Survivor Justice Act. This bill would allow survivors of domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, and/or trafficking who were incarcerated as a result of actions related to their abuse an opportunity for sentence modification, parole, or commutation hearings. It would also allow for judicial discretion for future cases that would otherwise require a mandatory minimum sentence to be imposed.

SLJ is a long-time partner of organizations in the state that focus on the advocacy and protection of victims and survivors of domestic and sexual violence, as well as the expansion of awareness and policy advancement on related topics. We understand that every experience by a victim or survivor is unique and complex, and that hearing these different stories provides an opportunity for us to propose and pass laws with increased trauma-informed and victim-centered language.

There are multiple reasons a person might not disclose the violence they have experienced during their initial processing and sentencing – including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, fear of retaliation, and ineffective legal representation. There are even cases where victims or survivors are not aware what they experienced is classified as domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or trafficking. This can happen especially if a person grows up in an environment where these behaviors are happening on a regular basis.

Additionally, because of mandatory minimum sentencing laws, there are over 70 crimes where a minimum sentence must be imposed, regardless of circumstances of the crime. Passing HB 5306 would allow for judicial discretion where it might not otherwise be possible and give an opportunity to victims and survivors who need a second chance to be heard. It is imperative that we begin to institute policy that seeks to reform areas in our systems where we chronically keep failing women and other marginalized groups of people. Change in these spaces is possible, and failing to change is a choice.

### **H.B. 5309 An Act Concerning the Provision of Notice to a Parent or Guardian of a Minor Child Who Seeks to Receive Pregnancy-Related Health Care Services**

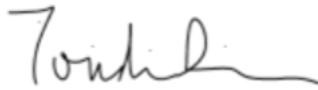
Finally, SLJ voices its strong opposition to H.B. 5309 An Act Concerning the Provision of Notice to a Parent or Guardian of a Minor Child Who Seeks to Receive Pregnancy-Related Health Care Services. This legislation would create harmful barriers to abortion care which do not align with

Connecticut's longstanding commitment to protecting reproductive freedom and access to care, especially for young people in our state.

Last year, CT reaffirmed the rights of young people to confidentially consent to a spectrum of reproductive health care, including contraceptive and pregnancy-related care. Minors in CT can make their own decisions about testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, testing and prophylaxis, and treatment for HIV, mental and behavioral health care services, and substance abuse treatment.<sup>2</sup> Passing HB 5309 would be a step backwards in a time when reproductive health care is under attack federally, and from other states.

Additionally, requiring notification and the imposition of a judicial bypass system will create a significant barrier to individuals seeking care by causing them undue delay in treatment. The judicial bypass system is burdensome, stressful, and further stigmatizes young people who are seeking pregnancy and abortion-related care. Connecticut needs to continue to update and expand our laws related to this topic, not explore ways to make access to care more difficult and stigmatized.

Thank you for your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tonishia". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Tonishia Signore

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<sup>2</sup> Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 19a-216, 19a-592, 19a-14c, 17a-688.