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Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Committee.

I am writing to urge your support of our request for funding under the Department of Social Services to fully fund one full-time Child & Family Advocate in each of Connecticut's 18 domestic violence organizations, including Prudence Crandall Center, Inc, which provides services to survivors and children in your district including the towns of Berlin, Bristol, Burlington, Kensington, New Britain, Plainville, Plymouth, Southington & Terryville.



Testimony Regarding

HB 5005, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021

Department of Social Services

Appropriations Committee

February 19, 2020

Prudence Crandall Center, Inc. provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Berlin, Bristol, Burlington, Kensington, New Britain, Plainville, Plymouth, Southington and Terryville. Services include counseling, support groups, safety planning, court-based advocacy, transportation, assistance with securing basic needs and job training, and coordination with local law enforcement, among others.

I am writing to urge your support of our request for funding under the Department of Social Services (DSS) to fully fund one full-time Child & Family Advocate in each of Connecticut's 18 domestic violence organizations, including Prudence Crandall Center, Inc.

Last year we provided services to 218 children and 2,205 adults. Because our Child & Family Advocate is not a fully funded position, we must compete for funding from multiple sources to provide needed services for children. During the last fiscal year, we worked diligently and were fortunate to secure funding through the multiple sources, including: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, Violence Against Women Act, United Way of Central and Northeast CT and the American Savings Fund.

In the end, because this is not a fully funded position, our Child & Family Advocate does not have the full amount of time ideally necessary to best meet the needs of the children and parental victims/survivors they serve.

It is important that children who experience family violence in their home are provided a comprehensive and holistic approach that takes into account their different needs. Families benefit from services that incorporate a multi-faceted approach involving both large and small scale change. By working with the family unit, service providers gain greater insight into the level of violence experienced by all members of the family and can assist in the continuous development of age appropriate safety planning.

Currently our Child & Family Advocate utilizes a number of trauma-informed, evidence-based and resiliency-driven approaches to their work including the Devereux Early Child Assessment (DECA); Mom's Empowerment and Kid's Club curricula; play, music and art therapy, and child-specific responses to trauma and violence. The Child & Family Advocate will support the non-offending parent in identifying protective factors that will enhance the relationship with child(ren). Building protective factors are about helping to ensure the basic needs of the family are met, such as food, clothing, and shelter, as well as connecting parents and children to various services they request.

Children's Services Coordinator (CSC) worked with a young child who came to shelter with his mother approximately. It has been reported by mother and DCF that child was exposed to significant family violence and was exhibiting many indicators of trauma, including regression in areas of behavior and verbal/language skills. Over a period of one month, the child made significant gains. He began speaking more, his aggressive behaviors decreased drastically and he developed a positive connection with CSC and other staff members. CSC worked closely with mother to assist her in addressing and redirecting his behaviors in a safe, nurturing manner. CSC also modeled positive interactions for mother and she was very receptive to input/psychoeducation around IPV and child trauma. CSC continuously reassured mother that the best intervention for child trauma is to provide a safe, stable environment with calm, positive interactions. Child also received services from Healthy Families and Birth-to-3. CSC worked in collaboration with these agencies and DCF to ensure safety and well-being, while encouraging Mom to more deeply develop and trust her parenting skills. CSC accompanied Mom to family court. Mom was granted sole custody of child. And father's visits are required to be supervised in a center by therapeutic staff.

CSC provided support to a family who came to Prudence Crandall Center, Inc. (PCC) after being in a very vulnerable situation. Mom and her three adolescent children had been living in a van at a local truck stop, often without heat or adequate food. Mom had significant health issues and was hospitalized multiple times during the late winter and early spring. When the family arrived, each member presented with the negative impacts of trauma. Mom requested the children remain in their home school system, allowing them to maintain consistency and finish school year in a familiar setting. CSC supported this plan and advocated with the school district to provide transportation for all three children.

During their time with PCC, the family made great strides. Mom met regularly with CSC. Initially, the children were hesitant to meet one-on-one with CSC, so CSC allowed them to keep a bit of a distance but maintained informal communication and check-ins with each. Eventually, all three engaged with CSC for support and a trusted ear to listen. CSC provided support and encouragement for Mom, while reminding her that she was the stable force her children needed and relied on. CSC was able to support Mom as she began to trust her own insight into the trauma that she and her children endured. This led to Mom and children being vocal about what they each needed/wanted to begin deeper healing. CSC referred Mom to a community provider for clinical mental health therapy, and Mom worked closely with her new therapist. As Mom continued in therapy two of the three children also chose to seek clinical support for the violence and homelessness they had endured due to the abuse of their father. The children began to

present as happier, more confident and outgoing, which resulted in them being confident enough to transfer to new schools this past Fall. All were feeling a bit anxious, so CSC accompanied Mom and the children when they went to orientations, met guidance counselors, created class schedules. The children are currently happy and thriving in their new schools. One child was presented with an award at a school-wide assembly. CSC provided support for the teen, as there was some anxiety around getting up in front of the student body. CSC accompanied Mom to the award ceremony to provide support and encouragement. This family transitioned into PCC Supportive Housing Program and CSC provides on-going case management to the family. CSC has built a solid and positive rapport with mother and the children that continues to support and encouragement as they work toward achieving their individual, and collective goals.

Providing supportive evidence- and strengths-based resiliency services for children and the non-offending parent/survivor is paramount to the overall safety and stability of the family, but is not sustainable under the current funding structure. The Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, of which we are a member, is requesting \$954,000 in state funding under DSS to support one full-time Child & Family Advocate at each of the state's 18 domestic violence organizations. We urge your support of this request as it will have a substantially positive impact on our ability to meet the needs of the children and survivors who come through our doors each year.

Thank you for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Sincerely,

Beth Ann Morhardt
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*Peace & Care,
Beth Ann*

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Providing comprehensive domestic violence services for residents of Berlin, Bristol, Burlington, Kensington, New Britain, Plainville, Plymouth, Southington & Terryville.

"Courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen." ~Brene Brown