



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

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Flexer, Representative Abercrombie, and members of the Committee. Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury provides life-saving services to victims of domestic violence in Bethlehem, Cheshire, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Prospect, Southbury, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury. 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 Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury.

Last year we provided services to 136 children and 1,499 adults. Because our Child & Family Advocate is not a fully funded position, we must supplement funding for this position by seeking private foundation grants, holding fundraising events and direct appeals to our donors. 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 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.

Our Child & Family Advocate worked with a six-year-old girl at our Safe Home. The child was very close to her father and is very upset that she cannot see him. She sometimes gets upset with her mother for taking him away from her. The advocate met with both mom and daughter on a regular basis to help foster their relationship. The girl witnessed the incident brought them to our Safe Home and sent her dad to prison. Mom thought that she was doing a good job of shielding her daughter from the abuse, but this was not so. Often when she is playing with dolls, she will have the boy doll push the girl doll. When asked about it, she said, “daddies push mommies when mommies are bad”. Our Child & Family Advocate works with her on emotions and healthy behaviors as well as helping her to understand that the violence in their home was not normal.

This highlights one of the clients that our Child & Family Advocate was helping. In addition to the one-on-one counseling, when the client is in our Safe Home, the Advocate also assists the Mom with registering the child in a local school, ensuring that she/he has the proper uniforms, assists with arranging transportation, among other things. In the community, our Child & Family Advocate may be asked to accompany mom and child to the police station to make a report and/or to court for support and guidance through the legal system. Increasingly our clients present more and more complex issues for our Advocates to deal with.

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,

Lee R. Schlesinger, Executive Director

Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury

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Serving the towns of Bethlehem, Cheshire, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Prospect, Southbury, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury