



**Testimony of Cara Mackler, Manager of Campus Education & Outreach
Women's Center of Greater Danbury**

Appropriations Committee

**H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE 30, 2021.**

Department of Public Health - Rape Crisis Intervention and Prevention Services

February 21, 2020

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walked and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Cara Mackler and I am the Legislative Liaison and Manager of Campus Education & Outreach at the Women's Center of Greater Danbury. We are one of the nine community-based member centers of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence. We receive funds from the Department of Public Health that allows us to provide free and confidential services to victims of sexual assault in upper Fairfield and lower Litchfield county areas.

In fiscal year 2019, the Women's Center provided 4,286 life-changing sexual assault services to over 463 victims and survivors of sexual assault in our service area. This includes providing 2,512 counseling and support services, answering sexual assault crisis hotline calls, and accompanying over 138 victims of sexual assault to our local hospitals. Our services include individual counseling, safety planning, court advocacy, hospital advocacy, support groups, crisis intervention through two 24-hour hotlines, and educational and primary prevention programs. We serve victims in 13 towns in the Greater Danbury area including Bethel, Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Kent, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Roxbury, Sherman, and Washington.

Sexual assault intervention services are in more demand than ever. My role is working on our local university's campus to provide education and training to students and faculty on the issues of interpersonal violence and sexual assault. The funding we receive from The Department of Public Health is imperative for our education department to continue to provide these critical programs in schools and in the community that not only works to prevent these issues from happening but also connects so many victims to services that they need for help and support.

Often, our services are life-saving and life-changing. Funds from the Department of Public Health allow us to meet victims' needs and allow us to provide a wide range of services, which are often connected. For example, our education department was hosting an awareness event about sexual assault where individuals could share messages of support for survivors to combat victim-blaming. A young adult shared with the educator that she would like to come in for counseling.

www.wcogd.org

HEADQUARTERS
2 West Street, Danbury, CT 06810
p: 203-731-5200 f: 203-731-5207
womenscenter@wcogd.org

**sexual
assault
hotline**
203-731-5204

**domestic
violence
hotline**
203-731-5206

**women's
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helpline**
203-731-5206



When the client arrived at her appointment, she shared that she had experienced a number of instances of sexual assault in the past couple of years. The counselor was able to support this client by being empathetic and understanding, deconstructing myths and misconceptions about sexual assault, validating their feelings and experiences, and explaining their right to seek out help and report it if she wanted to. The client truly believed she was at fault and held on to the guilt that prevented her from seeking out help in the first place. She stated she would have never understood that what happened was nonconsensual had she not attended the Women's Center's event and learned about consent and sexual assault in that capacity. She told the counselor that this was the first time anyone had ever told her that her assaults were not her fault.

Our educational programs don't just educate young adults on our issues, but they also serve as a way for young adults to connect to our services and know that there is a place they can go if they are ever in need of support. Our advocacy at local hospitals, with local law enforcement, and on local universities assures that victims know all their options and can get connected to our services.

Funding for rape crisis programs is essential for community based sexual assault crisis programs to provide crisis intervention and advocacy services to thousands of children, adolescents, and adult victims of sexual assault in Connecticut. Please continue to support these critical services for victims and survivors of rape and child sexual abuse by keeping the level of funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services in the Governor's budget. Survivors need our support and services.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions about the importance of full funding for rape crisis services.

Sincerely,
Cara Mackler
Manager of Campus Education & Outreach
Women's Center of Greater Danbury
cara.m@wcogd.org
(203)837-3939

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