

## **Preserve State Funding for Sexual Assault Crisis Services**

Testimony of Cynthia Dugan, Sexual Assault Victim Advocate

Rape Crisis Center of Milford

Serving Ansonia, Derby, Milford, Orange Seymour Shelton, West Haven

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, I understand and appreciate the difficult decisions this committee faces in making funding decisions for the many programs and representatives of those programs that come before you. Once again I find myself in the position to ask that you continue to support and preserve funding for the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence and its nine member centers.

My name is Cindy Dugan. I have been an advocate for the Rape Crisis Center of Milford for the past 26 years. Over that time, I have seen positive and negative influences that affect the health and wellbeing of victims of this crime. I have testified in support of or against legislative proposals introduced regarding changing laws and altering services in respect to crimes of sexual violence. However, I have consistently testified in support of preserving or increasing state funding for the Alliance and its nine member centers. Supporting survivors of sexual assault remains a priority because despite increased efforts and expansion of services the number of victims served continues to grow.

In 2018 the Rape Crisis Center of Milford served 422 victims of sexual assault and their families. In 2019 that number increased to 552. Unlike other state agencies, there is no duplication of services. We are available to support and serve clients on a 24/7 basis through our confidential hotline. Additionally services might include accompaniment to hospitals for a medical evaluation and the collection of forensic evidence, accompaniment to forensic interviews for children, accompaniment to our police departments when the victim gives their statement, accompaniment to the State Attorney's office in preparation for testifying at trial and being present in court when they do testify. Our services also include one on one counseling and support groups. Our services extend well beyond the investigation and adjudication process. We also provide guidance, advocacy, and support through accompaniment at parole hearings. We provide these services with the assistance of our dedicated volunteers and a staff of 10 which I am proud to say has grown

over the past few years from a staff of 7 thanks to your continued consideration and funding along with our fundraising efforts we are able to provide these services free of charge to our clients.

In November of 2019 our entire staff provided support and accompaniment to a victim through a grueling two week court trial as she took the stand and had to re-live the details of the sexual assault she endured. This victim told us how grateful she was to have had our support that gave her the strength to follow through from first reporting to end of trial. Also the State's Attorney who represented this client stated how much she appreciated our continued presence in the court room during the entire process. Our support of this victim did not end there. We will also be present to support her when the defendant, who was found guilty will be sentenced in March and she will address the court through her victim impact statement.

In addition and critically important is our prevention education program that we provide from pre-kindergarten through grade 12, and through our campus advocate at the University of New Haven. College students, particularly incoming freshman are at high risk for becoming a victim of sexual assault. Statistics show that 1 in 4 students will be sexually assaulted. Our advocates both in our primary schools and the University of New Haven work very hard to educate our students on how to prevent this from occurring.

On behalf of our center, all the dedicated victim advocates in Connecticut providing these critical services, and most important the victims of this crime who need these services following a crime that leaves them frightened, confused and ashamed I ask that you continue to provide this critical funding to the nine sexual assault crisis service programs because you too recognize the ramifications to the victims we serve if funding does not continue to be a priority.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you through this testimony.

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