



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Testimony Supporting

HB 5742, AAC the Use of COVID-19 Relief Funds for Domestic Violence, Mental Health, Suicide Prevention and Substance Abuse Service Providers

Member Organizations

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services
Ansonia, CT

The Center for Family Justice
Bridgeport, CT

Women's Center
Danbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program United Services
Dayville, CT

Network Against Domestic Abuse
Enfield, CT

Domestic Abuse Services Greenwich YWCA
Greenwich, CT

Interval House
Hartford, CT

Chrysalis Domestic Violence Services
Meriden, CT

New Horizons
Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center
New Britain, CT

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services
New Haven, CT

Safe Futures
New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services
Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project
Torrington, CT

Safe Haven
Waterbury, CT

Domestic Violence Program United Services
Willimantic, CT

Appropriations Committee March 26, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy.

We thank the proponents for raising this bill and the Committee for drafting it. Given the pandemic-related challenges facing Connecticut's domestic violence service system described below, CCADV respectfully requests that the Committee include **\$1.35 million** to provide additional staffing to the state's 18 domestic violence organizations and Safe Connect to address the increased service and hoteling needs of victims.

The pandemic has had a tremendous impact on domestic violence services across the state. Last March there was a rapid transition to remote advocacy by over 400 advocates across the state at CCADV's 18 member organizations and at Safe Connect, the state's domestic violence resource hub and centralized hotline. Advocates worked tirelessly to ensure that services remained functional 24/7 and to proactively outreach to existing clients to address any new needs due to the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic we have seen an increase in the complexity of issues facing survivors. Certainly many aspects of an abusive relationship are compounded by the dynamics of a global pandemic. A pandemic limits options for everyone, but this can be felt even more acutely by victims and survivors who are already dealing with control and limited options in their lives.

Our 18 member organizations also made quick adjustments to their shelter settings to adhere to public health guidelines. However, given that Connecticut's domestic violence shelters normally run well above capacity at about 125%, social distancing requirements served to further strain this vital service. The result has been a substantial increase in the use of hotels as a way to keep survivors and their children safely housed. Between March 2020 and February 2021 our 18 member organizations have spent over \$800,000 in unanticipated hotel costs – more than ten times the normal annual cost of hotel expenses needed for the safety of domestic violence victims.

Throughout the summer and fall our CEO worked diligently to secure private philanthropic dollars to leverage additional federal emergency relief funds, securing a total of \$1.2 million to cover unanticipated hoteling costs. However, with uncertainty about the duration of ongoing impact of the pandemic, we worry that the need for hoteling of domestic violence survivors may likely exceed available funding later this year. It is also important to note that our member organizations have borne other significant unanticipated costs as a result of housing multiple families in hotels. Each of the following hotel-related costs are in addition to maintaining these services within the shelter:

- Providing three meals a day;
- Paying for Wi-Fi to facilitate remote learning and remote work;

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- Providing laptops or tablets to children so that they can participate in remote learning; and,
- Increased staff time to manage hoteling, including issues listed above and typical case management with survivors and children.

Certainly, one of the most pressing needs facing the state's 18 domestic violence organizations and Safe Connect is the cost related to increased staffing needs due to pandemic-related service increases and hoteling. The increase in off-site hotel placement has resulted in a huge increase in the staff time needed to serve survivors. In terms of the number of people placed in hotels, between March 1, 2020 and March 25, 2021, 518 survivors and children stayed in hotel compared to 230 individuals during Fiscal Year 2019. And survivors and their children have stayed in hotels much longer during the pandemic. Between March 1, 2020 and March 25, 2021, the average length of a hotel stay has been 30 days. During FY19, the average length of a hotel stay was 11 days. That's a 173% increase in the average amount of time a survivor and her or his children stay in a hotel.

Because our member organizations have relied so heavily on hoteling to provide emergency shelter throughout the pandemic, their staff has been stretched thin. Under normal circumstances, save for two or three clients who might be staying in a hotel, most shelter clients are within the shelter. Therefore, if you have 2 full-time shelter staff on for a given shift, they can manage the needs of all the residents there onsite. However, now that many organizations have several clients off-site in hotels, staff need more time to manage issues at multiple locations such as transportation, coordination of food delivery, and management of the hotel stay/room rental.

Additionally, Safe Connect has seen an increase in service requests during the pandemic. Comparing February 2020, the month prior to the pandemic lock down, to February 2021, Safe Connect saw increases of 45% in the number of contacts to the hotline (1,283 vs. 1,862), 36% in the number of services provided (4,344 vs. 5,913), and 22% in the overall number of survivors served (697 vs. 849). As we previously mentioned, the needs of survivors have grown increasingly complex during the pandemic. For instance, during the pandemic we have seen an increase in the number of survivors requesting interventions with employers, creditors, and landlords.

Again, given these challenges, CCADV respectfully requests that the Committee include **\$1.35 million** to provide additional staffing to the state's 18 domestic violence organizations and Safe Connect to address pandemic-related service increases and hoteling increases. Recognizing that this would be one-time money allocated from federal relief packages, this staffing would likely be accomplished through temporary, part-time or per diem positions.

Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

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