



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Testimony Regarding

HB 6439, AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor

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

Judicial Department Budget

Appropriations Committee February 26, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Winfield, Representative Candelaria 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. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the budget before you, as well as to speak to a very significant funding problem that may be hitting every state next year.

We urge you to protect funding for domestic violence services under the Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services (OVS) budget, including "Other Expenses" and the Criminal Injuries Compensation fund, both of which fund a number of programs and initiatives beyond domestic violence services. In terms of domestic violence, some of the services supported by the Judicial Branch OVS include:

- **Court-Based Victim Advocates in Criminal and Civil Courts and on Domestic Violence Dockets** – these advocates provide essential supports to victims navigating the court system including safety planning, counseling and court advocacy; funding provided by OVS in recent years has allowed the state's 18 domestic violence organizations to increase advocacy in civil courts to assist the more than 8,000 victims who annually seek restraining orders.
- **Domestic Violence Victim Advocates who work with adults** – these advocates provide shelter- and community-based counseling, safety planning, assistance with accessing housing, systems advocacy for basic needs, advocacy with DCF, assistance with securing job training, and more – they are a critical component to comprehensive victim services.
- **Safe Connect (Statewide Domestic Violence Resource Hub)** – the statewide resource hub/centralized hotline launched in November 2019 and has allowed us to better meet the needs survivors.
- **Legal Services Partnership** – Judicial funding that is matched through fundraising by the state's 18 domestic violence organizations supports a partnership with legal services providers to provide legal assistance to victims with various civil court matters while the domestic violence organization provides case management.

The Judicial Branch has been faced with budget reductions in recent years that have had an impact on the ability of the judicial system to respond to domestic violence. Statewide domestic violence service data for FY 2020 shows that over 34,000 victims throughout the state received court-based advocacy from our 18 member organization. We are grateful that OVS has worked diligently to ensure that these critical nonprofit domestic violence services remain funded and available. We urge you to prevent any potential budget reductions that could ultimately limit domestic violence service options and potentially compromise victim safety.

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As I mentioned, we also want to bring to your attention the potential for a large reduction in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding that would have a negative impact on domestic violence services statewide. Federal VOCA funding is passed through Judicial Branch OVS to CCADV and our 18 member organizations. These funds are used to support the services mentioned above such as Safe Connect, which is our 24-7 crisis response system and hotline, along with the short- and long-term counseling, and victim advocacy provided by local domestic violence programs in your communities. We will know more about any potential impact this fall when the President releases his budget proposal; however, we thought it was important to mention now. Judicial Branch OVS has been a vital partner in our work, going above and beyond to support and protect the services provided by CCADV and our 18 member organizations. We urge you to work with OVS to protect all of the victim services they fund.

We also urge the Committee to implement the proposal offered by the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance to increase funds to nonprofit service providers by \$461 million over five years. Of the \$461 million, it is estimated that \$217 million will come from the federal government through Medicaid reimbursement and \$243 million will come from state resources. Since 2007, community-based nonprofits have lost at least this amount because state funding has not kept pace with inflation. Nonprofits in Connecticut serve over 500,000 individuals each year and employ about 12% of the state's workforce – we are the backbone of the state's human service system, yet we continue to fall behind. Once an initial investment is made into the nonprofit system, the state must index future increases to an inflationary index to ensure that state funding will keep pace with increased costs in the future.

Finally, it is important to note that the domestic violence service system, like name services, have been impacted by the pandemic. However, our service system was already stressed even before this pandemic began. Aside from further investments directly to domestic violence services, there are many other types of services and policies that are critical to victim safety. Access to safe, affordable housing is one of the most pressing needs facing survivors and their children. A survivor's ability to achieve safety, stability and financial independence are also intrinsically tied to education and job training, pay equity, access to affordable child care; and legal representation. We urge the Committee to prioritize these issues.

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

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