



Testimony of: Kerry Linden  
Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury

Appropriations Committee

**HB 6349 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**

Department of Public Health - Rape Crisis Intervention and Prevention Services

February 25, 2021

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Kerry Linden, the Child and Family Advocate Specialist at Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury. We serve Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott, and Woodbury, providing free confidential services to sexual assault survivors and their loved ones. Some of these services include our toll-free 24-hour hotline, accompaniments throughout medical, court, and police procedures, individual counseling, prevention education, and support groups.

In my role at Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury as the Child and Family Advocate Specialist, I provide counseling services to children and their families who are victims of sexual violence. I am a member of our Child Abuse Interdisciplinary Team in which I provide support services and counseling to families who are attending a forensic interview. I am also a member of our Legislative Advocacy Committee in which I strive to help be a part of the process of making change where needed to best meet the needs of our clients. The funding we receive from The Department of Public Health is instrumental in making all of this possible. This past year especially, has posed a strain on our budget. As the COVID pandemic hit, we had to quickly pivot to continue delivering services to our clients and accommodate their needs. We also had to make an investment in upgrading our technology, to allow our advocates to work remotely. Our advocates were able to provide virtual counseling services with video which was especially important for the advocates working with children.

In fiscal year 2020, Safe Haven advocates assisted over 400 clients with services such as individual counseling, medical or law enforcement advocacy, criminal justice, support groups and immigration issues among others. 126 child clients and their families were supported through the forensic interview process. In addition to those services, Safe Haven has two community educators that present to the schools in our service area from Pre-K through college, as well as to community groups and professionals. Over 11,000 students and over 2,000 adults participated in presentations ranging from good touch/bad touch, self-esteem, safe dates, internet safety, etc. These programs are presented with age appropriate materials for each topic. Of course, these numbers would have been higher if not for the pandemic. Our educators were able to continue with presentations virtually for some schools, however the process took longer to get off the ground as the school systems adjusted to remote or hybrid learning.



Safe Haven was forced to cancel our two major fundraisers last year, leaving a \$50,000 hole in our budget. We have already cancelled our spring fundraiser for 2021 as the pandemic continues. The need has grown, but the funding has not. DPH funding is important to Safe Haven so that we can continue to serve our clients that have experienced the trauma of sexual violence as well as keeping the prevention education program going in an effort to prevent the violence before it occurs.

There are two aspects of the work we do at Safe Haven that makes our agency so unique. First off, we strive to always maintain great connections with our twelve law enforcements agencies. We maintain open communication with each agency always striving to work together to best meet the needs of our victims. This relationship has allowed us to be called upon by law enforcement to be there for a victim during their time of need. An example of this is when a victim needs to give a statement, law enforcement is quick to reach out to a Safe Haven advocate to ensure that they are present for the victim. Without this relationship with law enforcement there would be victims who are not getting the support they need. Another unique aspect of our agency is the tremendous involvement our child advocate position has with the Child Abuse Interdisciplinary Team of Greater Waterbury. My role requires me to be present at every forensic interview held and to also be a supportive advocate/counselor for the parents and children during this difficult time. The child advocates established role with this team has helped better serve children and their families from the beginning of the criminal process and beyond.

Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury strives to assist all clients with their needs from relocating, bills, education expenses, food, clothing, shelter, and any need that may arise that infringes on their ability to move forward after experiencing a trauma. Our agency is asked on a daily basis for financial assistance from our clients and therefore rely heavily on funding to make this happen. For example, we recently had a mother with four children where two of the four children were sexually assaulted by their step-father. This family needed to be relocated for their own safety and had to leave abruptly, leaving many of the things they need behind due to the fact that the step-father destroyed much of their personal possessions. Our agency was able to help this family by helping to pay the security deposit and first month's rent as well as provide them with financial assistance to purchase household items such as furniture, small appliances, clothing, food and some toys for the children. Without our assistance this family did not have to deal with additional stressors of trying to figure out where they could go. The funding provided by Safe Haven was a blessing as stated by the mother who is happy to report that the family is doing well, children are happy in their new home and all are still active in counseling services at Safe Haven. This is just one of many stories in which Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury has assisted clients in many ways. The funding received has a tremendous impact in how affectively we can provide these services to our clients. This funding also helps to employ the staff needed at the agency that can continue to serve our clients as well as assists them with expenses that they cannot afford.

Sexual assault intervention services are in more demand than ever. Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury has seen an increase in need for counseling services, prevention education, and financial assistance for an increasing number of clients especially during COVID times. There is a greater need now more than ever to reach populations that are most vulnerable, and due to COVID, our agency has had to become creative in how we do this which has created an increased need for more technology and virtual programs. Funding to our programs



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and our other member centers is needed in order to continue serving our populations and continuing to meet the ever-changing ways in which we can achieve this.

Survivors need our support and services. While there is continued need and increased cost, we urge you to keep the funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services at nothing less than level funding. I want to thank you all for taking the time to read this testimony and really gaining a better understanding of why this funding to our programs is extremely important. An increase in funding to our agency and member centers would be a tremendous help in increasing our prevention efforts in our communities, as this is something extremely important to the work we do because it helps to curtail sexual violence.

Thank you.

*Kerry Linden*

*klinden@safehavenofgw.org*