

CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE



Support. Advocate. Prevent.

March 2, 2021

Testimony of Lucy Nolan, Director of Policy and Public Relations
Appropriations Committee, Public Health Subcommittee

**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

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan. I am the Director of Policy and Public Relations at the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (The Alliance), the statewide coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services centers. Our mission is to create communities free of sexual violence and provide culturally affirming, trauma-informed advocacy, prevention, and intervention services centered on survivors' voices. Funding from DPH assists us with that our work.

On behalf of our member programs and the victims and survivors we serve, I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you this evening and for your history of supporting those who work every day with child, adolescent, and adult victims of sexual violence. Our Member Centers have also submitted testimony to the committee, giving an overview of their work in our communities.

The Alliance sexual assault crisis services provided through our member centers are the only programs in Connecticut that specialize in both the counseling and advocacy needs of sexual assault survivors and their supporters. Certified sexual assault counselors proudly work to address the unique and emerging needs of all victims, including victims of child sexual abuse, campus sexual assault, prison sexual assault, survivors from ethnic and racially diverse communities, and survivors from LGBTQ communities.

Our hotline is available 24/7 for *any* assistance, from talking to victims of sexual violence, others who are affected by the violence to accompanying a victim to the hospital for a sexual assault/rape kit. We operate the only Spanish-speaking, free, and confidential 24-hour hotline in the country. This kind of response is unique to sexual assault victim advocates. It has a long-term positive impact on the physical health and emotional well-being of survivors of sexual violence. For some survivors, something may trigger their trauma and we are there to help them through it.

This past year has been a difficult one for both clients and the member centers. The lockdown necessitated a shift by our member centers to ensure that victims/survivors received the care needed. Physical in-person meetings shifted to virtual Zoom meetings for counseling and group sessions, and accompaniments during a sexual assault kit at the hospital were via the phone when being with the victim was not possible. Fundraisers were affected by decreasing the number of funds available to their budgets.

Like all plans, COVID created problems and demanded solutions, which our member centers found quickly. We promptly realized that we needed an alternative form of communication for those who needed us to reach us and may not feel safe talking. We are building a text-to-talk vehicle for that purpose. Clients will be able to text directly to a certified sexual assault counselor when they choose. DPH has helped with the outreach for the plan.

[Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence Member Centers](http://www.endsexualviolencect.org)

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During the first four months of the pandemic, there was a 341% increase in calls for emotional support from victims, their families, and others affected by sexual violence. While the number decreased over the summer and fall crisis calls to the hotline doubled. Needs change and our centers were able to meet the requests. In addition, to help with their needs regarding sexual violence, clients needed food, housing, homelessness, and employment resources. Advocates, who are mandated reporters, called in 974 unique cases to DCF for child sexual abuse from February 2020 to January 2021.

Upon the onset of the pandemic and social isolation, The Alliance held a training to help identify and support child survivors of sexual violence. "Being Present During Times of Social Distancing: CSA 101" was held to provide service providers with the tools to identify signs of childhood sexual abuse, risk factors, and the skills to respond appropriately to sexual abuse/assault disclosures. Due to the increase in online/remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the level of technological dependence that consequently increased, more emphasis was placed on the risks of online harassment, predatory behaviors and vulnerability posed on children and young adults.

If we must stretch our dollars, positions at our programs become vacant, victims must wait for services, and other providers and partners must wait for important trainings. Please continue to support these critical services for victims and survivors of sexual violence and child sexual abuse with the funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services as proposed in the Governor's budget.

Thank you.

Lucy Nolan

Lucy@EndSexualViolenceCT.org