



**The Center for
Family Justice**

Testimony of: The Center for Family Justice

Appropriations Committee

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**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

March 1, 2021

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Angela Schlingheyde, the Director of Civil Legal and Court Advocacy Services at The Center for Family Justice. We provide free and confidential services to sexual assault, domestic violence and child abuse survivors and their loved ones in Bridgeport, Stratford, Fairfield, Trumbull, Monroe and Easton. Some of these services include our toll-free 24-hour hotline, accompaniments throughout medical, court, and police procedures, individual counseling, civil legal assistance, prevention education, and support groups.

Funding for rape crisis programs in the Department of Public Health budget is essential for community based sexual assault crisis programs to provide crisis intervention and advocacy services to thousands of child, adolescent and adult victims of sexual violence. We, at The Center for Family Justice, are asking that you approve a budget that increases the current funding for rape crisis intervention and prevention services, or at the very least, maintains the current funding.

The funding we receive from The Department of Public Health is essential to ensure sexual violence survivors are able to access the services they desperately need. COVID-19 has had a devastating effect on survivors. Primarily, many survivors have been unable to access services due to the shutdown and forced quarantining. This has been especially true for our most vulnerable survivors, children. Children who are victims of sexual abuse are stuck at home with their abusers and do not have access to schools and other activities that might enable them to disclose the abuse. We were forced to shift to virtual sessions for counseling and group sessions, as well as hospital visits. This presented new expenses in order to acquire the necessary technology.

Additionally, our clients faced an increase in unemployment, housing insecurity, food insecurity and an inability to pay bills. They are building more debt, which is negatively affecting their credit. Our clients need assistance with basic necessities and we have had to find ways to assist them. These expenses were not in the budget because there was no way we could have prepared for this event.



Hope Starts Here





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The CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence and its member agencies are the only organizations in the state providing these services to sexual violence survivors. Our adult advocates, child advocates, college campus advocates and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) are essential to victims and survivors healing. We provide access to resources they need to put their victimization behind them and move forward with a healthy and happy life. Sexual violence damages a person in ways that are unimaginable. The resulting trauma can have life-long consequences. However, we know that when survivors are provided with necessary services, the effects of trauma on the brain can be reversed. Additionally, our prevention education programs work with the schools and universities in our area to educate students about consent, healthy relationships and how we all play a part in eradicating gender based violence. The funding provided for sexual violence and prevention education services will ensure that victims and survivors in communities can have hope.

In 2017, CDC published a study, "Lifetime Economic Burden of Rape Among U.S. Adults," in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine to address this gap in our knowledge (Peterson, DeGue, Florence, & Lokey, 2017). The key takeaways from this study are as follows:

- Sexual violence is a serious and costly public health problem in the US.
- Rape results in more than \$122,000 in costs per victim and nearly \$3.1 trillion to the economy over the lifetimes of all 25 million victims in the US population.
- With about 25 million rape survivors in the US right now, we can expect to spend more than \$3 trillion over their lifetimes on health care, criminal justice response, lost productivity, and other costs.
- The impacts and costs of sexual violence extend well beyond the direct effects on victims and perpetrators. Sexual violence hurts us all, and it can be prevented.

Survivors need our support and services. Without the essential rape crisis line item in the state budget, The Center for Family Justice would not have the funds to provide even remotely adequate services to the victims of sexual violence in our area. 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

Thank you for your consideration,


Angela Schlingheyde, J.D.

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