



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

#### Department of Social Services Budget

#### Appropriations Committee March 3, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Kushner, Representative Abercrombie 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.

The Governor's proposed budget includes level funding for domestic violence services under the Department of Social Services (DSS) budget with a small increase to reflect the continued phase-in of the increase in the state minimum wage. While we thank the Governor for not proposing any spending reductions to our services, we must acknowledge that twelve years of level funding coupled with the impact of the pandemic may leave some providers in a precarious position. We also would keep in mind that almost all of Connecticut's domestic violence shelter beds are almost always full; and that some significant services including some of the local shelter staffing and Connecticut's 24/7 domestic violence hotline are currently funded only through September 2022. I'll give you more information about that in a minute, but first I briefly want to update you on the domestic violence network's efforts to keep people safe from both violence and illness during the pandemic.

At the onset of the pandemic, there was a rapid transition to remote advocacy by over 400 advocates all 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 survivors. Certainly many aspects of an abusive relationship are compounded by the dynamics of 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 and December our 18 member organizations spent nearly \$600,000 in unanticipated hotel costs. This is well above a typical statewide annual cost of \$75,000.

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

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

The longer-term issue I referred earlier is with regard to Connecticut's reliance on federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) funding for a portion of local shelter support and all of the support for Safe Connect, our 24/7 crisis response system. At present, the federal government has planned an enormous reduction in VOCA funding. VOCA funding is passed through the CT Judicial Branch Office of Victim Services to CCADV and our 18 member organizations. These funds are used to support services such as crisis response (including the statewide, centralized resource hub and hotline), short- and long-term counseling, and victim advocacy. We will know more about any potential impact this fall when the President releases his budget proposal; however, we thought it was important to bring this to your attention now. Across the country advocates are working with the Administration and Congress to try to fix this problem – but absent a federal fix, it will become a state problem.

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 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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