

My name is Paola Serrecchia and I am a Family Advocate from Clifford Beers Clinic in New Haven. I am here to present testimony on behalf of a client that could not be here today. She is 23 year old mother of 3 children with one suffering from a life-threatening auto-immune disorder. She and her children were referred to the clinic due to trauma symptoms they were experiencing. In the most recent incident the perpetrator hit the sick child until she bled. He then awoke the mother by beating and strangling her in front of the children. He was arrested and charged with attempted murder, risk of injury to minors 3<sup>rd</sup> degree, breaking and entering, breach of peace and interfering with police. As the Family Advocate I am there to help her navigate and to support her through the legal process that she believed in. We went to court after he had violated his probation by committing another violent assault.

What I witnessed at court was my client shaking, having to stand next to the perpetrator while he stood next to his attorney. She had no money for an attorney and as the advocate I was not allowed to address the court to assist her with her victim impact statement. I believe this is something that should change. Because no matter how prepared a client is to testify, the intimidation of the proceedings can put victim in paralyzing fear.

The judge also did not impose any optional orders to foster safety for the family. The very next day the perpetrator shut off the utilities and the cell phones. Using finances as a form of control and revenge, he wasn't even thinking of the sick child's well being since now she could not use her oxygen tank. He continued to harass her via social networking and through family friends. I think the language about the judge's discretion of enacting these orders should be stronger than just "encouragements."

On September 30, 2011 all felony charges were dropped and he pleaded guilty to a lesser misdemeanor charge of risk of injury to a minor. I believe there should be a minimum sentence imposed on violations of probation, especially if there is a violent act. We have many laws regarding probation violations that have minimum sentences. Isn't a person's life and safety important enough to warrant a minimum sentence for a violation? As a result of the judgment, the risk to the family increased and she was eventually accepted into the Witness Protection Program and has fled the state. This is why she cannot be here today.

The day before the family left the state, I had the opportunity to attend a Domestic Violence Awareness event at the University of New Haven where, for the first time, she read aloud her story. I have attached her story and would like to read an excerpt:

[read excerpt]

You called this hearing today to hear the voices of the people. I am here to tell you that the people want to hear justice.