

2014 Policy Priorities

Member Agencies

The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services
Ansonia, CT

The Center for Women & Families
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

Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis
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

STRENGTHENING JUDICIAL PROTECTIONS

Enhancing Restraining Orders

Current state law governing civil restraining orders [§ 46b-15(b)] does not specifically address financial orders and should be strengthened to clearly allow the inclusion of financial remedies for victims (e.g., spousal and child support) where determined appropriate by a judge to ensure the continued safety of the victim.

Ensuring Quality Batterer Intervention Programs

We support the efforts of the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission (CJPAC) to develop and implement uniform, accepted standards for Batterer Intervention Programs.

Advocating in Family Court

Funding should be allocated to support one fulltime Family Violence Victim Advocate at each of the 18 domestic violence agencies who is dedicated solely to civil matters, including assistance with applying for restraining orders and safety planning for those victims in the family court.

Holding Offenders Accountable Upon Release

C.G.S. § 29-144 should be updated to require professional bail bondsmen to adhere to the same premium financing arrangements required of surety bail bondsmen as outlined in C.G.S. § 38a-660.

ENHANCING VICTIM SUPPORT SERVICES

Meeting the Needs of Spanish-speaking Victims

Funding should be allocated to enhance the current statewide, toll-free domestic violence hotline to increase accessibility to culturally-specific information by bilingual, certified domestic violence counselors for victims in Spanish-speaking communities with no or limited English proficiency.

Funding the Rising Cost of Services

Allocate adequate funding that keeps pace with the rising cost of providing services that nonprofits, including domestic violence agencies, face as they contract with the state to provide health and human services on its behalf.

KEEPING VICTIMS SAFE AT HOME

Increasing Funding for Rapid Rehousing

As a member of the Reaching Home Campaign, we support increased funding for rapid rehousing while ensuring that victims living in domestic violence shelters have equal access to the funds similar to other homeless individuals in the mainstream system.

Maintaining Utility Services

We will work with the utility companies and the CT Public Utilities Regulatory Authority to develop a possible waiver for victims who are required to pay a security deposit to establish a utilities account.

(Please see reverse side for additional details about these priorities.)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CCADV'S 2014 POLICY PRIORITIES

Enhancing Restraining Orders: Financial abuse occurs in 98% of abusive relationships. This may include denying access to family income, forbidding the victim to work or sabotaging the victim's employment, hiding assets or running up debt in the victim's name. Victims often cite lack of access to financial resources as a reason for remaining in an abusive relationship. At least 37 other states include financial remedies in the civil restraining order. By solely focusing on acts of physical violence and not considering other forms of abuse, as Connecticut's current restraining order statute does, the state is not fully addressing the safety and basic needs of victims who seek to end abusive relationships.

Ensuring Quality Batterer Intervention Programs: Connecticut is currently 1 of 6 states that have not established standards for Batterer Intervention Programs (BIPs) that judges refer offenders to following an arrest for domestic violence. Of the 44 states with standards, 70% are statutory and include enforcement mechanisms. While many of Connecticut's BIPs are contracted through the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division (CSSD) and therefore have contractual requirements, according to CSSD, approximately 10,000 domestic violence-related criminal cases do not get referred to CSSD contracted BIPs. There is no oversight or outcome measurements for other BIPs.

Advocating in Family Court: CCADV's 18 member agencies are currently funded to provide Family Violence Victim Advocates (FVVA) in each criminal court in the state, but the same cannot be said for family courts where victims seek restraining orders, divorces and child custody. In 2012, there were 8,937 civil restraining order applications filed, with 5,328 ex parte (temporary) orders issued (59%) and 3,234 restraining orders issued (60% ex parte, 36% of applications).

Holding Offenders Accountable Upon Release: Several years ago C.G.S. § 38a-660 was updated to establish guidelines for premium financing arrangements entered into by surety bail bondsmen. No such guidelines have been established for professional bail bondsmen. Professional bondsmen are able to bond-out offenders for very little money giving the offender little incentive to obey court orders. Additionally, we have anecdotally heard that surety bail bondsmen will refer offenders to professional bail bondsmen so that the offender will not be subjected to the premium financing requirements.

Meeting the Needs of Spanish-speaking Victims: The 2010 census shows that Hispanics and Latinas make up 13.4% of Connecticut's population. In 2011, Hispanic/Latina victims made up 21% of the service population. Spanish-speaking victims who call the existing statewide domestic violence hotline are typically connected via Language Line, which is a service utilizing a bilingual individual to translate between the victim and certified domestic violence counselor. The translator is not a counselor and it can be traumatic for a victim to have to tell their story through a third person. Between January 1, 2013 and September 30, 2013, CCADV has spent almost \$11,000 for a service that does not properly meet the needs of victims.

Increasing Funding for Rapid Rehousing: Rapid Rehousing is one of several key housing programs funded by the state that assists victims transitioning out of shelter into more permanent housing. The temporary housing assistance provided through this program is often an essential component for a victim leaving an abusive relationship and establishing self-sufficiency.

Maintaining Utility Services: Current public utility regulations (§ 16-262j-1) require that individuals pay a security deposit to begin a new utility service if that service has been terminated within the prior 2 years or if an individual has a poor credit history. For domestic violence victims, this termination may have been caused by their abuser and they may not have the financial ability to pay a deposit. A victim who has experienced financial abuse may also have had their credit ruined by their abuser. Louisiana is one example of a state that provides a waiver of such fees for individuals who can prove their status as a domestic violence victim.