

Connecticut Commission on
Women, Children *and* Seniors



Testimony of
Christine Palm
Commission on Women, Children and Seniors
Submitted to the
Judiciary Committee
March 15, 2017

Re: **Raised Bill 980: AAC A VICTIM'S RIGHT TO BE REASONABLY PROTECTED FROM THE ACCUSED.**

Senators Doyle and Kissel, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee: thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors in reference to **Raised Bill 980: AAC a Victim's Right to be Reasonably Protected from the Accused.**

My name is Christine Palm, and I serve as Communication and Women's Policy Analyst for the CWCS.

The CWCS is strongly in favor of this bill, as it will protect victims of domestic violence by strengthening existing laws. It is, essentially, a bill about information. As citizens, we rely on our government, and its agencies that deal with emergencies, to notify us of potential threats: we are warned about severe snowstorms when we are in their path. We benefit from public notice if there is a registered sex offender living in our neighborhood. We get "Amber Alerts" on our phones and highway LED billboards when a child is kidnapped.

It only makes sense, then, for a victim of domestic violence to be forewarned if her abuser has surrendered — or has refused to surrender — a firearm. I use the female pronoun here because, while there are indeed men who suffer from domestic abuse, the majority of DV victims are women.

There is real urgency to this bill, because domestic violence is not going away any time soon. According to CCADV, in 2016 nearly 40,000 Connecticut residents sought help for violence at home. And these are just the people who reached out to one of CCADV's 18 member organizations. Many more acts go unreported. In fact, one-third of all criminal cases in Connecticut concern family violence.

The presence of guns greatly exacerbates the danger. The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) reports that "the presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by 500%."

The CWCS also represents the rights of children, one in 15 of whom are exposed to intimate partner violence each year, according to NCADV. Fully 90% of these children are eyewitnesses to this violence.

Bill 980 allows for a week's grace time before such notification. In our view, this is a long wait, given that women who leave abusive partners are at greatest risk immediately after leaving, and so ideally, the notification period would be immediate. However, we realize this is procedurally difficult, and so a seven-day maximum is better than none at all.

Similarly, if the alleged offender enters a pre-trial diversionary program, the victim should be notified.

And finally, we believe it is right and just for any victim of violence who has applied for, or been granted, a protective order, to be able to work in an environment that is free from coercion or discrimination caused by her situation. Employees should be allowed to take necessary time off to make court-ordered appearances, and to participate in any investigations.

This bill will continue to strengthen Connecticut's laws — already among the toughest in the country — and will arm victims with knowledge they can use to make informed choices about their own safety and that of their loved ones.