

Dear Members of the Connecticut Joint Commission on Judiciary,

We are writing to ask for your support in passing the CT Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA).

Domestic Violence & Incarceration

In Connecticut, women represent the fastest growing percentage of Connecticut's total population of incarcerated people. Since 1978, the number of women in prison in Connecticut has increased sixfold and the number of women in jail has increased sevenfold.¹

A growing body of evidence has consistently found that domestic violence is a risk factor for incarceration and the vast majority of incarcerated women (about 75%) have experienced domestic violence during their adulthood. In fact, a 2024 in-depth survey by Stanford University's Criminal Justice Center of two large women's prisons found that 74% of the people there had experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) in the year prior to their offense. *Of those who experienced IPV, 66% were found to have been in extreme danger of being killed by their partner and 60 percent had a partner who choked or strangled them.*²

This is why the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA) is essential.

What is the DVSJA?

DVSJA significantly reduces harm to survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, and stalking by giving the justice system the power to reduce a defendant's punishment if those experiences were a contributing factor in their offense. It also allows currently incarcerated survivors to apply for sentence modification, parole, or commutation.

DVSJA:

- **Enhances Judicial Discretion:** DVSJA enhances a judge's ability to consider domestic violence, stalking, and trafficking as mitigating factors when determining a sentence.
- **Is Narrow in Scope:** It is narrow in scope as it provides sentencing relief through specific requirements developed in collaboration with domestic violence organizations.
- **Is Trauma-Informed:** It also brings a more trauma-informed approach to the sentencing and modification requests of survivors.

Why does Connecticut need DVSJA?

In Connecticut, more than 70+ crimes carry mandatory minimum sentences and many of these apply regardless of the circumstance of the crime. This policy tends to minimize or even negate the role that

¹ Incarceration trends in Connecticut. (n.d.). <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-connecticut.pdf>

² Publications. (n.d.). *Fatal peril: Unheard stories from the IPV-to-prison pipeline*. Stanford Law School. <https://law.stanford.edu/publications/fatal-peril-unheard-stories-from-the-ipv-to-prison-pipeline/>

domestic violence can play in women's offenses. The DVSJA would provide the judicial discretion to adapt sentencing to the survivor's unique circumstances.

Doesn't the system already take domestic violence into account?

DVSJA will make Connecticut law more aligned with the lived experiences of survivors by recognizing that there are a number of reasons why a person's experiences of survivorship may be minimized or obscured within the criminal justice system:

- Defense attorneys will sometimes recommend that defenders refrain from bringing up experiences of domestic violence in court, either because they believe it will not be received well or because they see it as difficult to prove.
- Survivors may fear retaliation against their family members if they speak of the abuse, causing them to refrain from making the court aware of the role domestic violence played in the offense. Still others fear their family will be deported or their children taken into state custody if they reveal the extent of the abuse.
- High rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) amongst survivors may mean that it takes a survivor months, even years to recover from the trauma of the abuse and communicate their story effectively.
- There are cases where survivors did not understand that their experience was one of domestic violence, stalking, or trafficking, especially if they grew up in a home where this type of behavior was normalized.

Concerns About Case Volume and Misuse

The DVSJA is unlikely to result in a flood of cases. Since a similar law was enacted in New York, only 154 people have applied for relief over six years, averaging just 2 cases per month statewide. Additionally, misuse is improbable. Applicants must provide two forms of documented proof of being a survivor of domestic violence, stalking, or trafficking to apply for sentencing modification under the DVSJA in Connecticut.

The DVSJA ensures that the unique and complex experiences of domestic violence survivors are being taken into consideration. It also ensures that Connecticut's laws continue to keep pace with our evolving understanding of domestic violence, stalking, and trafficking.

We urge you to pass this essential piece of legislation for the state of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Organizations (28)

- CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- Drop LWOP New England
- She Leads Justice
- Criminal Justice Advocacy Clinic of the Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization
- Katal Center for Equity, Health and Justice
- New Horizons

- Susan B. Anthony Project
- Meriden-Wallingford Chrysalis
- American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut
- Safe Futures, Inc.
- Prudence Crandall Center
- Project SAGE
- The Network Against Domestic Abuse
- Center for Family Justice
- Domestic Violence Crisis Center
- YWCA Darien/Norwalk
- Rock the Walls Foundation
- Connecticut Judicial Accountability Lawsuit
- Walden University Master's Program in Nursing
- Tick tock around the clock 24 hrs daycare service LLC
- Women's Community Justice Association (WCJA)
- Town of New Canaan Human Services
- Emma Kate Freatman, LLC
- YWCA Greenwich
- Kids in Crisis
- Women Empowering Women Institute
- Project Sage

Individuals (CT) (60)

Tonishia Signore	Tashieanna O'Connor	Denise Gannalo
Anjali Pathmanathan	John B. Watkins	Robin Woods
Miriam Gohara	Shaquan Smikle	Carolyn Gammerman
Claire Sullivan	Lauren Moreno	Joy Clark
Ivetty Estepan	Anna VanCleave	Sara Eckhoff
Kevin Chisolm	Rev. Dr. Sharon	Lauren Brown
Nancy Peters	White-Harrigan	Larissa Vreeland
Nilda Rivera	Erika Sanchez	Steviann Martines
Kevin Chisolm	Jessica Fico	Allie
Isabella Gilmour	Dr. Wendy Levy, PsyD	Maggie Truax
Katherine Verano	Taina Manick	Noonie
Marie Kenny	Joann Coviello	Zelie D. Pforzheimer
Caroline C. Wilcox	Alyssa MacKenzie	Edmund Mander
Patricia D'Alto	Emma Kate Freatman	Nancy O'Hara
Sandy Nathan	Bethany Zaro	Emily Smith
Alexandra Hochman	Scott Herr	Tom Watson
Karen Robbins	Bethany Zaro	Meg Allen
Margaret Sullivan	Dede Bartlett	Lillian Gleason
Carol L. Kardas, SPHR, CCP,	Jessie DiMuzio	Megan Goodfield
SHRM-SCP	Martha Huitron Pina	Suzanne Cassano
Melissa Wilder RN, BSN	Robert Curry	

Individuals (Regional - New York & New England states) (13)

Dr. Brashani Reece, PsyD	Grace Jensen
Pamela Hiland	Amanda Mittermaier
Michelle Horton	Kimberley Favata
Nikki Addimando	
Alexandra Bailey	

Rebecca Nidorf
Nikki Addimando
Wendy Freedman
Shay
Natalie Pattillo