

# Judiciary Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5306 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING SENTENCE REDUCTION OR RELIEF FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, STALKING OR

**Title:** HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

**Vote Date:** 3/24/2026

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/2/2026

**File No.:** 598

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This legislation aims to amend laws involving sentencing, sentence modification, commutation, and parole for defendants who are survivors of domestic violence, stalking, or trafficking of persons, and whose history of abuse is a contributing factor to the commission of their offense. The legislation would allow courts to impose more trauma-informed sentences and reduce the sentences of defendants who can show the abuse they survived was a contributing factor in the commission of their offense.

### SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

The substitute language changes “may” to “shall” relative to hearing testimony and mandatory relief, strengthening the requirements of the bill.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

**Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity (CWCSEO):** They testified in support of HB 5306 with recommendations, emphasizing that understanding the role of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking as contributing factors to criminal behavior provides critical context for fair sentencing. They highlighted that many survivors are criminalized due to coercion, self-defense, or trauma-related circumstances rather than patterns of criminal behavior. They supported the bill’s provision allowing courts to consider this context during sentencing and recommended the development of specialized diversionary programs for survivors of human trafficking, as well

as expanding eligibility within existing family violence diversionary programs to better serve survivors.

**Deborah Del Prete Sullivan, Legal Counsel, Director, Office of Chief Public Defender:**

They testified in support of HB 5306, noting that the bill provides survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking, who may have been criminally charged due to their victimization, with a process to present evidence for sentence modification, commutation, or parole suitability hearings. They explained that the legislation allows courts discretion to depart from mandatory minimum sentences when clear evidence shows the survivor's victimization contributed to the offense and stressed the importance of mitigating evidence being considered in sentencing to ensure fair and trauma-informed outcomes.

**Division of Criminal Justice:** They testified in opposition to HB 5306, arguing that existing Connecticut law already allows courts to consider a defendant's status as a survivor of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking at sentencing and in sentence modification requests. They stated that judges have broad discretion under current statutes and procedures, including the use of presentence investigation reports, to consider trauma, background, and mitigating factors. The Division expressed concern that the specific sentence reductions proposed in the bill could be arbitrary, undermine proportionality, and fail to account for the seriousness of offenses, multiple convictions, and public safety considerations. They concluded that sentencing flexibility is essential to appropriately reflect the complexity of each case.

**Judicial Branch, State of Connecticut:** They took no position on HB 5306 but raised concerns regarding implementation. The testimony noted that courts already consider a defendant's history, including victimization, through pre-sentence investigations, and cautioned that the bill could create additional procedural burdens, such as extended hearings and logistical challenges. It also highlighted potential issues with requiring original sentencing judges to hear motions and with data reporting requirements, emphasizing the need to address these operational considerations.

**DeVaughn L. Ward, Esq., Correction Ombuds, State of Connecticut:** He testified in favor of HB 5306, highlighting that the bill allows courts to account for the circumstances of survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking when determining sentences. Ward emphasized that many individuals in the criminal justice system have themselves been victims of prolonged abuse and trauma, which can contribute to criminal behavior. He noted that the legislation provides clear safeguards, including documentary proof requirements and judicial fact-finding, and creates mechanisms for sentence modification, parole consideration, and commutation. Ward further stressed that incorporating trauma-informed approaches promotes fairness, accountability, and public safety, and that public reporting on the bill's application ensures transparency.

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Anonymous 37:** They testified in support because HB 5306 allows for decreased sentencing or relief for individuals who are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. They state that victims acting in trauma situations, particularly in self-defense, should receive sentencing consideration that reflects their circumstances.

**Anonymous 38:** They testified in support of HB 5306, explaining that the bill allows for sentence reductions for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking who acted in response to trauma or to defend themselves, ensuring that the legal system accounts for the impact of abuse on their actions.

**Anonymous 45:** They testified in support because HB 5306 (the CT Survivors Justice Act) provides sentencing relief and second chances for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. They explained that survivors are often shaped by trauma, fear, and control, and should not be defined by actions taken under those circumstances. They state that the bill recognizes survivors' resilience, supports healing and rehabilitation, and provides meaningful opportunities to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose.

**Anonymous 46:** They testified in support of HB 5306, describing it as a vital pathway for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking to have their trauma recognized in the criminal justice system. They believe the bill provides an opportunity for healing, second chances, and the ability to rebuild their lives, ensuring that survivors are not perpetually punished for actions taken under fear, coercion, or trauma.

**Anonymous 47:** They testified in support because HB 5306 provides an opportunity for sentencing relief for survivors who have experienced trauma and demonstrated significant personal growth during incarceration. They describe their own transformation through healing, education, sobriety, and service to others, emphasizing accountability and rehabilitation. They state that the bill would offer individuals like them a meaningful second chance to continue contributing positively to their families and communities outside of incarceration.

**Anonymous 48:** They testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing the bill's importance as a second-chance opportunity for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. They highlighted how incarceration affected their ability to care for their children and pursue personal growth, and stressed that the legislation offers hope, recognition of trauma, and a path toward rebuilding their lives while addressing the long-term impacts of abuse.

**Anonymous 49:** They testified in support of HB 5306 because the bill provides sentencing relief for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking who have engaged in rehabilitative and therapeutic work during incarceration. They describe their own personal transformation, including accountability, therapy, mentorship, and violence prevention efforts, emphasizing that their rehabilitation equips them to reenter society productively. They assert that the benefits of reentry outweigh continued incarceration and that the bill allows the judicial system to consider the impact of past trauma in future sentencing decisions.

**Anonymous 57:** They testified in support of HB 5306, sharing their personal experience of prolonged domestic violence and abuse throughout childhood and adulthood. They emphasized that the bill provides survivors a path to recognition, healing, and fair sentencing by acknowledging the complex realities of trauma, coercion, and survival, and highlighted the

broader impact of the legislation in breaking cycles of violence and empowering future generations.

**Marcia Baker:** She testified in support of HB 5306, the Survivor Justice Act, emphasizing the importance of the legislation for families of survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. She shares her personal perspective as the mother of an incarcerated survivor, highlighting how survivors' voices are often unheard at trial and how trauma can impact outcomes. She stresses that the bill allows the justice system to consider a history of abuse in sentencing and recognizes the capacity for change, healing, and growth. She urges the committee to vote favorably on the bill.

**Karen Foley O'Connor, CEO, The Network:** She testified in support of HB 5306, the Survivor Justice Act, representing The Network, which provides critical services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and stalking in multiple Connecticut towns. She emphasizes that the bill ensures survivors' victimization can be considered in sentencing and allows incarcerated survivors to apply for sentence modification when abuse contributed to their offenses. She notes that current law often fails to account for trauma-related offenses, compounding survivors' suffering. She highlights that other states have enacted similar measures and that the bill promotes fair, trauma-informed sentencing without altering verdicts. She urges the committee to support and advance the bill.

**Shannon J. Coulter, MSW Candidate, University of Connecticut School of Social Work:** She testified in support of HB 5306 in her personal capacity, emphasizing the importance of a structured sentencing framework for survivor-defendants. Drawing on research and her academic experience, she highlighted that many survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or trafficking often do not have evidence of abuse fully presented during their cases due to safety concerns, stigma, and procedural barriers. HB 5306 ensures that documented abuse can be considered as a contributing factor in sentencing without altering convictions or mandating release. Coulter stresses that the bill creates a narrow, consistent, and evidence-based mechanism to promote accurate and proportional sentencing for survivors.

**Ashley Dunn, MS, MFT, NCC, President and CEO, The Center for Empowerment and Education (CEE):** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing the need for trauma-informed sentencing for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. She highlighted that survivors often become involved in the criminal justice system as a direct result of coercion, self-defense, or survival-related crimes, and that Connecticut's current laws do not always account for this context. She stressed that the Survivor Justice Act allows courts to consider documented abuse and the impact of trauma when determining sentences without eliminating accountability. She noted that similar laws exist in multiple states and that HB 5306 ensures Connecticut's criminal laws reflect survivor-centered progress. She reported that CEE served over 2,000 survivors in the past year and urged the committee to support the bill to promote fair sentencing and evidence-based criminal justice reform.

**Kenneth B. Lerman, P.C., Attorney at Law:** He testified in support of HB 5306, the Survivors Justice Act, emphasizing that the bill allows judicial discretion for sentence modification, parole, or commutation hearings for survivors of human trafficking, domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault. As an adjunct professor of law at Quinnipiac University

School of Law and a member of the Connecticut Bar Association's anti-Human Trafficking Committee, he stressed that survivors of human trafficking are among the most vulnerable in society. He urged the legislature to provide these survivors with protections both from their abusers and from the legal system, calling the Survivors Justice Act an important tool for their protection.

**Isabella Gilmour, Susan B. Anthony Project:** She testified in support of HB 5306, the Survivors Justice Act, explaining that the bill ensures survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking can have their experiences considered during sentencing. She emphasized that many survivors become entangled in the criminal justice system due to coercion, self-defense, or survival strategies, and without such consideration, the law can compound their trauma. She highlighted that the bill provides judges with a structured, trauma-informed mechanism to issue fair, survivor-centered sentences, without altering verdicts. She stressed that HB 5306 is a natural next step in Connecticut's progress toward justice that accounts for the full context of trauma. She works as a Domestic Violence Advocate and Counselor at Susan B. Anthony Project, which serves survivors in 20 towns across Litchfield County.

**Emily Granelli, BHcare – The Umbrella Center for Domestic Violence Services and Hope Family Justice Center:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking should have their victimization considered during sentencing. She explained that many survivors become involved in the criminal justice system due to coercion, self-defense, or survival-related actions, and without this context, sentencing can compound their trauma. She noted that the legislation provides a structured, trauma-informed framework for judges to issue fair sentences without altering verdicts. She described this as a continuation of Connecticut's shift toward survivor-centered policy, aligning criminal law with existing reforms in civil areas. She also highlighted that BHcare served over 5,400 survivors in the past year, underscoring the need for fair, evidence-based approaches to justice.

**Sheila N. Hayre, Chair, Connecticut Bar Association Committee on Human Trafficking:** She testified in support of HB 5306 on behalf of the committee, emphasizing that the legislation allows courts to consider credible evidence of abuse during sentencing, resentencing, and in parole or pardon proceedings. She explained that survivors of trafficking and other forms of abuse are often prosecuted without full consideration of the circumstances that contributed to their actions, as many remain hidden due to fear, coercion, trauma bonds, shame, or distrust of the legal system. She noted that the bill does not excuse criminal conduct but ensures that trauma-informed sentencing leads to more equitable outcomes. She also highlighted that passage would align Connecticut with other states that have adopted more just and compassionate approaches for survivors in the criminal legal system.

**Marilina Imperati:** They testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing the importance of protecting and supporting individuals in vulnerable situations and the role of family guidance and care.

**Milagros Marrero-Johnson, Social Worker:** They testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, and human trafficking who were incarcerated due to actions connected to their abuse should have access to sentence modification, parole, or commutation. They highlighted the importance of

judicial discretion, particularly in cases involving mandatory minimum sentences, and stressed that the bill ensures survivors' complex experiences are meaningfully considered. Drawing on their perspective as a social worker, they underscored that this approach reflects an evolving understanding of trauma and supports more just outcomes for survivors.

**Lauren Karpisz:** They testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking who were incarcerated due to actions connected to their abuse should have access to sentence modification, parole, or commutation. Drawing on their experience as a previously incarcerated survivor, they highlighted how trauma, including PTSD, can significantly influence the circumstances leading to incarceration. They stressed that while accountability remains important, sentencing should reflect the full context of abuse. They also noted research showing high rates of violence among incarcerated women and emphasized the need for judicial discretion, particularly in cases involving mandatory minimum sentences, to ensure more equitable and trauma-informed outcomes.

**Sidney E. McCoy, Esq., Director of Advocacy, Shared Hope International:** They testified in support of HB 5306, explaining that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking are often criminalized due to coercion, prolonged abuse, and trauma-driven survival responses. They emphasized that the bill provides courts with a structured, discretionary pathway to consider whether a survivor's victimization was a contributing factor to their offense, without eliminating accountability. They noted that trauma-informed sentencing improves rehabilitation outcomes and reduces recidivism and highlighted that the legislation aligns Connecticut with other jurisdictions recognizing the intersection between victimization and criminal behavior.

**Anjali Pathmanathan, Supervising Attorney and Criminal Justice Advocacy Clinic Fellow, Jerome N. Frank Legal Services Organization at Yale Law School:** They testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that the bill provides judges with necessary discretion to consider whether a survivor's experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking contributed to their offense, particularly in cases involving mandatory minimum sentences. They highlighted that the legislation requires clear and convincing evidence, ensuring that relief is applied in a structured and limited manner. They also cited research demonstrating that abuse is a significant pathway to incarceration, particularly for women, and stressed that the bill aligns Connecticut with other states that have adopted trauma-informed sentencing approaches.

**Nancy Peters:** They testified in support of HB 5306, explaining that many incarcerated individuals, particularly women, have histories of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse that directly contribute to their offenses. They emphasized that survivors often normalize or fail to recognize their abuse at the time of their legal proceedings, and therefore may not communicate its impact during sentencing. They highlighted that the bill provides an important opportunity for survivors, who may only later understand and articulate the connection between their trauma and their actions, to have that context considered in a fair and informed manner.

**Krystal Rich, Executive Director, Connecticut Children's Alliance:** They testified in support of HB 5306, highlighting that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking often become involved in the criminal legal system due to prolonged

trauma, coercion, and survival-driven behavior. They support that the bill allows courts to consider these circumstances in sentencing, ensuring fairness while maintaining accountability, and noted that trauma-informed approaches strengthen justice outcomes for survivors.

**Tonishia Signore, Policy Director, She Leads Justice:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking who were incarcerated due to actions related to their abuse deserve an opportunity for sentence modification, parole, or commutation hearings. They highlighted that the bill provides judicial discretion in cases otherwise bound by mandatory minimums, ensuring trauma-informed, survivor-centered consideration, and noted that mandatory minimum laws often prevent courts from fully accounting for the complex circumstances of survivors' experiences.

**Wilhemina Triplett:** She testified in support of HB 5306, sharing a personal account of her daughter's incarceration and the impact of unaddressed domestic violence in her original sentencing. They emphasized that the current legal system often fails to consider the effects of survival under abusive conditions, leading to sentences that do not reflect the full circumstances. They highlighted that the Survivor Justice Act provides judges the authority to review evidence of abuse and coercion, allowing for fairer, more accurate sentencing.

**Keith Wallington, Senior Campaign Strategist:** He testified in support of HB 5306, describing it as a pragmatic reform that strengthens Connecticut's sentencing framework by promoting accountability, enhancing public safety, and addressing longstanding inequities. He emphasized that the bill provides a structured, judicious process to assess whether continued incarceration is necessary based on present-day circumstances, allowing for individualized review grounded in fairness. He noted that the bill reflects a growing national consensus recognizing the need for sentencing systems to balance accountability with proportionality and an understanding of trauma, while also aligning with Connecticut's context, national trends, and bipartisan momentum.

**Erin Williamson, LCSW, MPA, Chief Programs Officer, Love146:** She testified in support of HB 5306, highlighting that the bill addresses the unique circumstances of survivors of human trafficking and other forms of abuse who become entangled in the criminal justice system due to coercion, control, or threats. She emphasized that the legislation allows courts to consider a survivor's victimization during sentencing, ensuring those already harmed are not further punished. She noted that HB 5306 reflects national best practices by recognizing the impact of trauma and providing a pathway to sentencing relief, positioning the legal system as a mechanism for justice and healing.

**Rebecca Zipkin, Policy Director, World Without Exploitation:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that the bill provides a trauma-informed, evidence-based approach to sentencing for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking. She highlighted that survivors are often criminalized due to coercion and exploitation and face systemic inequities. The legislation allows courts to consider abuse as a contributing factor in offenses, adjust sentences, and apply discretion around mandatory minimums. She noted that similar reforms in New York have successfully reduced incarceration for survivors while maintaining accountability, promoting rehabilitation, and advancing equity in the justice system.

**Katherine Braner, Executive Director, Arthur Liman Center for Public Interest Law at Yale Law School:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking are often criminalized due to abuse, coercion, and trauma that are not fully considered at sentencing. She highlighted that the bill creates a structured, evidence-based process for courts to revisit sentences while maintaining judicial discretion and public safety considerations. Drawing on experience and examples from other states, she noted that similar reforms promote fairness, proportionality, and confidence in the justice system by allowing individualized review and more context-informed sentencing outcomes.

**Zahria Cooper, Family Violence Victim Advocate, Prudence Crandall Center:** She testified in support of HB 5306, explaining that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking are often criminalized due to coercion, fear, and survival-related actions tied to their abuse. She emphasized that the bill ensures courts can consider victimization in sentencing and allows currently incarcerated survivors to seek sentence modification when abuse was a contributing factor. Drawing on direct client experiences, she highlighted how survivors can be held legally accountable for actions compelled by abusers and stressed that the legislation promotes fair, trauma-informed sentencing while advancing Connecticut's broader efforts toward survivor-centered justice.

**Marlena O'Day:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking are often criminalized due to trauma, coercion, and experiences that may not be fully understood or disclosed at the time of sentencing. She highlighted that the bill provides an opportunity for sentence modification and judicial discretion, allowing courts to better account for the complex realities of abuse. Drawing from personal and family experiences, she stressed the importance of recognizing delayed trauma responses and ensuring survivors have a meaningful opportunity to be heard and fairly considered within the justice system.

**Daniel Erwin, President, Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers' Association:** He testified in support of HB 5306, except for the sentencing guideline provisions, emphasizing that incorporating a more comprehensive understanding of a defendant's circumstances, including experiences of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking, leads to more effective and just sentencing outcomes. He aligned with the position of the Office of the Chief Public Defender, supporting the bill as a step toward more thoughtful, individualized sentencing that benefits both defendants and society.

**Miriam Gohara, Clinical Professor of Law, Yale Law School:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking are often criminalized due to trauma and abuse that is not fully considered during sentencing. Drawing on decades of legal experience and research, she highlighted that a significant proportion of incarcerated individuals, especially women, have histories of violence, and that these experiences are frequently minimized due to fear, trauma, or lack of resources. She explained that the bill provides a necessary mechanism for courts to consider victimization through sentence modification and judicial discretion, promoting fairer sentencing and improved rehabilitation outcomes.

**Beth Hamilton, Executive Director, Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence:** She testified in support of **HB 5306**, highlighting that the bill provides a trauma-informed approach to sentencing for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking, and stalking. The legislation allows courts to consider a survivor's victimization as a contributing factor in criminal behavior and permits currently incarcerated survivors to seek sentence modification. She emphasized that the bill does not overturn convictions or remove accountability, but ensures sentencing reflects the realities of abuse and supports healing. She also noted that HB 5306 would align Connecticut with other states that have enacted similar survivor justice measures.

**Betty Hines:** She testified in support of HB 5306, sharing her experience as the mother of a daughter who was incarcerated for actions related to surviving domestic violence. She emphasized that the current law did not allow her daughter's history of abuse to be considered during sentencing. She described the physical, verbal, financial, and emotional abuse her daughter endured, including incidents she personally witnessed, and how attempts to seek help were often ineffective due to systemic limitations. She highlighted that survivors are frequently silenced by shame or threats of further violence, preventing the court from seeing the full context of their experiences. She argued that the Survivors Justice Act is essential because it allows judges to understand the "why" behind a survivor's actions, giving courts the discretion to account for abuse and deliver more just and trauma-informed sentences.

**Kenneth James II:** He testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking often suffer in silence and may not receive adequate support or recognition from the justice system. Drawing on personal experiences and observations, including his military background, he highlighted the impact of trauma and PTSD on decision-making and behavior. He explained that the bill would allow courts to consider these complex experiences through sentence modification and judicial discretion, ensuring more fair and informed outcomes while keeping pace with evolving understandings of trauma.

**Serina Julien:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that many survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking are criminalized for actions directly connected to their abuse. She highlighted that survivors often do not disclose their experiences due to fear, trauma, or lack of awareness, which can prevent courts from fully understanding the context of their actions. She explained that the bill provides a pathway for sentence modification and judicial discretion, promoting fairness, accountability, and trauma-informed justice while aligning the legal system with the lived experiences of survivors.

**Mary Lee A. Kiernan, President & CEO, Jackie Collazo, Director of the Harmony Project, and Simone Quartey, Director of the Center for Equity & Justice, YWCA**

**Greenwich:** They testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing that survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking are often criminalized for actions stemming from coercion, self-defense, or survival. They highlighted that current laws do not always allow courts to fully consider the impact of victimization at sentencing, leading to disproportionately harsh outcomes. The testimony noted that the bill enables courts to consider abuse as a contributing factor and allows incarcerated survivors to seek sentence modification, promoting fair, trauma-informed sentencing while maintaining accountability.

They also emphasized that the legislation aligns with reforms in other states and represents a necessary step in advancing equitable and evidence-based criminal justice policy.

**Patrick M. Nugent, Attorney:** He testified in support of HB 5306 because he believes Connecticut has not done enough to support survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking. He explained that the bill allows judges to consider a survivor's victimization when determining sentences, rather than being constrained by mandatory minimums, ensuring fair and trauma-informed sentencing.

**Rose Pericas:** She testified in support of HB 5306 because she believes the Survivors Justice Act is crucial for allowing survivors of domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault, and trafficking, who were incarcerated due to their abuse, an opportunity for sentence modification, parole, or commutation hearings. She emphasized that the bill recognizes the complex effects of trauma on behavior, including neurobiological changes from chronic abuse, and ensures that Connecticut's laws remain trauma-informed and aligned with the lived experiences of survivors.

**Dr. Brashani Reece, Executive Director, Drop Life Without Parole New England:** She testified in support of HB 5306 because she believes the Survivors Justice Act is essential for recognizing the delayed and often invisible impact of trauma on survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking. She emphasized that trauma is frequently not processed or disclosed at the time of arrest or trial, and the bill ensures survivors are not permanently penalized for failing to articulate their experiences while still surviving. The Act provides a pathway for fair, trauma-informed consideration of sentencing for those whose criminalized actions were directly linked to their victimization.

**Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV):** The coalition testified in support of HB 5306 because it brings a trauma-informed framework to sentencing, gives incarcerated survivors the opportunity for sentence modification, and aligns Connecticut with other states that have successfully implemented similar survivor justice laws.

**Alix Simonetti, Legislative Liaison, Human Rights and Responsibilities Section, Connecticut Bar Association:** She testified in support of HB 5306 because the bill allows courts and the Board of Pardons and Paroles to consider whether a person was a victim of human trafficking and whether the abuse they suffered contributed to their offense. She emphasized that this consideration is essential for ensuring that mandatory minimums do not prevent fair sentencing and that victims receive relief that supports their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

**Katelyn Trionfetti, Board Member - One Standard of Justice:** She testified in support of HB 5306 because she believes Connecticut can improve equity in sentencing for survivors by learning from New York's experience with its survivor's law. She emphasized that carve-outs in other states have led to unintended disparities, leaving the survivors who experienced the most extreme abuse serving the longest sentences. She highlighted that allowing judges full discretion to consider each survivor's circumstances ensures fairness, addresses racial and prosecutorial inequities, and gives all victims of domestic violence and sexual assault the opportunity for relief.

**Bernadette Volikas, Previously Incarcerated Survivor:** She testified in support of HB 5306, emphasizing the need for judicial discretion to account for the unique circumstances of survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and trafficking. Drawing on her personal experience, she highlighted how mandatory minimum sentences often fail to consider the abuse that contributed to offenses. She noted that incarcerated survivors are frequently mothers, daughters, and community members whose trauma continues to impact their lives. Volikas cited research showing that a majority of incarcerated women have experienced intimate partner violence, often at extreme levels, and argued that HB 5306 provides a pathway for sentence modification, parole, or commutation, ensuring each survivor's circumstances are individually evaluated.

**Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel, ACLU-CT:** She testified in support of HB 5306 because she believes many incarcerated people are survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. She emphasized that the bill allows judges and the Board of Pardons and Paroles to consider abuse as a contributing factor when determining sentences, parole, or commutation, ensuring fair, trauma-informed relief supported by clear documentary evidence.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

**Michele May, LMFT:** She testified in opposition to HB 5306, arguing that the bill could undermine accountability within the justice system by expanding opportunities for post-conviction relief based on abuse histories. Drawing on her clinical experience in trauma recovery, she emphasized the importance of personal responsibility in healing and expressed concern that the legislation could allow unverifiable claims, weaken deterrence, and create additional burdens on the courts. She also raised concerns about fairness to victims of crimes and argued that reforms should instead focus on prevention, therapeutic support, and maintaining accountability.

**Reported by:** Trevor Ellis

**Date:** April 6, 2026