

Connecticut General Assembly



PCSW

Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

The State's leading force for women's equality

News Release

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Women's Safety Scores Big Advances in the House on Wednesday

HARTFORD — Women's safety scored three significant wins in the House of Representatives early Wednesday night, as legislators advanced bills to protect victims of domestic violence, strengthen anti-trafficking laws, and help women terminate parental rights of their rapists.

After hours of debate, the House passed H.B. 5054: An Act Protecting Victims of Domestic Violence, which addresses gun-related intimate partner violence by enabling a judge to order the removal of firearms from a home upon issuance of a temporary restraining order. Women are 12 times more likely to be killed if a firearm is present, and H.B. 5054 would dramatically lessen that risk during the critical time between when a woman files a restraining order and when that order goes into effect.

"This was a big day for Connecticut women's safety, because legislators in the House of Representatives took a multi-faceted approach to reducing violence against women," said Carolyn Treiss, executive director of the General Assembly's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW). "We applaud them for recognizing that women are victims of violence on several fronts — in the home, through human trafficking, and through current laws concerning parental rights of rapists. We now urge our elected officials in the Senate to pass these bills so they can be signed into law, sending a strong message that, in Connecticut, violence against women will not be tolerated."

Also late Wednesday night, the House unanimously advanced H.B. 5621: An Act Concerning Human Trafficking, which strengthens existing anti-trafficking laws in several ways, significantly: it eliminates the "mistake of age" defense and it attaches financial penalties to those convicted of buying sex.

"By going after the 'demand side' of this terrible crime, lawmakers are effectively punishing the traffickers, and not their victims," said Jillian Gilcrest, PCSW's senior policy analyst and chair of the Trafficking in Persons Council. "If this bill goes on to pass in the Senate and is signed into law, Connecticut's anti-trafficking laws will be among the strongest in the country. Significantly, we are no longer giving those who buy sex a 'pass' for claiming they did not real-

ize the person's age. Buying sex is illegal, and too often children and young women are the victims. This bill says it doesn't matter whether or not the purchaser knew the victim was a minor. It also penalizes the buyers by going after their pocketbook — where it really hurts.”

Finally, the House unanimously passed H.B. 5605: An Act Concerning the Termination of Parental Rights. Currently, a rapist may claim parental rights of a child conceived from the rape. Under this bill, a judge may determine that “clear and convincing evidence” of sexual assault is all that is needed to deny a rapist parental rights, and in so doing, prevents the re-victimization of the woman.

“We are thrilled this bill has passed through the House and is on its way to the Senate,” said Deb Heinrich, Director of Policy and Public Relations, Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS). “It will prevent rapists from using custody and visitation as a way to further victimize the woman and the child. Some rapists have told victims that they will not seek custody of the child if the victim promises not to press charges for the rape. Knowing that so few rape cases in criminal courts make it all the way to a conviction and imprisonment, it is critical that women in Connecticut who have been impregnated through rape have a clear and realistic path toward terminating the parental rights of her rapist.”

Each year, approximately 25,000 U.S. women become pregnant as a result of an act of sexual violence.

All three bills will now advance to the Senate, where they await votes.

About the PCSW: The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 1973 under Sec. 46a-1 of the Connecticut General Statutes to study and improve Connecticut women's economic security, health and safety; to promote consideration of qualified women to leadership positions and to work toward the elimination of gender discrimination. As a non-partisan arm of the General Assembly, the agency monitors, critiques and recommends changes to legislation in order to inform public policy, and assesses programs and practices in all State agencies for their effect on the state's women. The PCSW serves as a liaison between government and its diverse constituents, and convenes stakeholders, including the business, non-profit and educational communities, local governments, and the media, in order to promote awareness of women's issues.