



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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

**JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Public Hearing - March 2, 2026**

S. B. 5306 - AN ACT CONCERNING SENTENCE REDUCTION OR RELIEF FOR SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, SEXUAL ASSAULT, STALKING OR HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Except for the sentencing guidelines proposed in this bill, the Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD) **supports S. B. 5306 - An Act Concerning Sentence Reduction or Relief for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking or Human Trafficking.** The bill is similar, but not identical, to *S.B. 1502*, which was raised during the 2025 legislative session. The Office of Chief Public Defender is a member of the *Trafficking in Persons Council* and the *Trafficking Committee* of the *Connecticut Bar Association* at Quinnipiac School of Law. This office continues to work collaboratively with advocates for victims of trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking to recommend and implement a process for such survivors/victims to obtain relief when charged with a criminal offense. We thank this Committee and the General Assembly for previously adopting laws regarding vacatur and an affirmative defense for trafficked victims.

This bill is an important step in recognizing the duress and threat that many victims of trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking face in which their conduct ultimately leads to their being charged with a criminal offense. Persons who are often themselves victims of these offenses are prosecuted and convicted for various felonies.

The bill provides a process for a survivor to present evidence at their sentencing hearing and in support of a sentence modification or filing for a commutation. The bill also provides the court with the discretion to depart from a mandatory minimum sentence if it finds by clear

and convincing evidence that being a survivor of such offenses was a contributing factor in their commission of the offense. The bill provides eligibility for a survivor to submit an application for a parole suitability hearing before the Board of Pardons and Paroles. At all of these proceedings, the defendant/survivor is permitted to present evidence that shows that their survival as a victim of trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking was a contributing factor in their commission of the offense they are charged with or were convicted of. This mitigating evidence is crucial for the court or the Board of Pardons and Paroles to know.

While in support of the bill in general, the **Office of Chief Public Defender** *does not support the sentencing guidelines* articulated in this bill. It is important for the court to have the discretion to impose the sentence it believes appropriate based upon all of the facts presented. Consistent with its position in the past, the Office of Chief Public Defender supports the Court's discretion in sentencing or in any such proceeding as discussed in this bill.

In conclusion, the **Office of Chief Public Defender** requests **(1) that the sentencing guidelines be stricken from the bill and (2) that the Committee vote favorably on the remainder which provides eligibility for a survivor of trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking to seek relief.** Thank you for your consideration.