
Connecticut Protective Moms Keeping Children Safe in Family Court



**Connecticut Judiciary Committee
Public Hearings
How To Give Testimony for
Domestic Abuse and Family Court Bills**

The Judiciary Committee is now holding public hearings both in person and online so you may submit written and oral testimony on the following domestic abuse and family court related [laws this session](#). There are two ways to participate in the public hearing and you don't have to be an expert or write lengthy testimony.

This Guide offers information about hearing logistics and guidance to help you prepare to:

1. [Testify in person](#) in Hartford. To do so, you will be asked to register online. (Registration links will follow as they are published.)
 2. [Prepare your testimony](#) before the public hearing, which will be collected and provided to each member of the judiciary committee as well as posted online for public view. This will be a public document so if you are uncomfortable sharing your name, consider signing anonymously as CPM mom.
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To Testify in Person Via Zoom

- *You must sign up in advance to testify in person.* It's okay to sign up even if you're not certain you will be able to testify (you can cancel later, via the confirmation email).
The hearings begin at 10:00 am and there are many bills on the agenda. Be sure to find the bill(s) you will be testifying on and know when they follow on the agenda so you can be ready to jump in when it is your turn.
- *You'll receive a pending approval email* upon submitting your registration, and within 24 hours, a confirmation with Zoom login details. Be sure to save it! You can cancel via the link at the bottom of the email.
- *The speaker order is assigned at random* and will be listed on the Judiciary Committee website in the Public Hearing/Testimony [section](#) by 8:00 am on the day of the hearing. You can check the night before as it may be posted earlier. Click on the hearing date and at the very end of the list of written testimony click on the link, "Speaker Order."
- *Wear a Purple shirt or scarf* if you have one.
- *Prepare your testimony using the template below.* You are limited to three minutes. It is perfectly acceptable to read your testimony. The written testimony you submit, does not need to match your spoken testimony and many CPM moms attach references and cite examples from transcripts and other court-related documents. Remember, whatever you submit now becomes open to the public so be certain you want it in the public domain.
- *Testifying in person is not as daunting* as it seems. You don't have to be an expert and a personal story is remembered more than just citing statistics from online research.
- *How much time do I have?* You have just three minutes for your testimony. You will be stopped once you reach the three minute mark. Testimony should be no longer than it takes you to read at a

reasonable pace. Rushed or incomplete testimony is less effective (practice!). You may submit a longer written statement and summarize your remarks for delivery in person. It's fine to simply read from the page.

- *When do I need to show up?* The hearing will start at 10:00 am and will run for as long as it takes for all speakers to deliver their testimony (which could be all day, into the night.) You can view the hearing on [CT-N](#) (find it in the Live Streams on the left of the home page or [YouTube Live](#). If you are farther down on the speaker list, you can check back periodically to check on progress. But give yourself a buffer; if you aren't there at your allotted time, you will lose the opportunity to testify (not everyone ahead of you will show up.)
- *What do I do when it's my turn?* Be sure to login into Zoom ahead of when you will testify, mute yourself and keep your camera off. The clerk will promote you to a panelist when it's your turn. When you are called, unmute yourself, turn on your camera and begin your testimony. Introduce yourself clearly and the town in which you reside.
- *Indicate right away that you are testifying in support of* (Bill number). *Then explain your reasoning, making it as personal as you can.*
- *When you finish, stay in the meeting* as often the committee members have questions. Answer concisely and respectfully even when you are being challenged or your remarks misconstrued. If a legislator tries to take you off topic, it's OK to say you're not prepared to discuss it, as it's not relevant to the bill at hand. You're not expected to be an expert. If you don't have the answer, it's OK to say so. When the questioning ends, thank the legislators and log off. You can continue watching the hearing on [YouTube Live](#) or [CT-N](#).

Prepare your testimony (written or in person)

- *Copy the template below and be sure to fill in and remove the [bracketed blue information] before emailing your testimony in Word or PDF format. Then add your own information in your own words following the outline.*
- *To be most effective, testimony doesn't need to be lengthy, but it should reflect your own experience.* For in person testimony, include some of the talking points below from CPM template, but as much as possible reference your own case and how it happened that family court ignored your allegations of abuse.
- *If you are comfortable, we suggest that CPM moms open their testimony with similar messages from the template and then go on to explain what happened to you* and how educating family court professionals needs to be funded and executed by actual domestic abuse experts.
- *Our goal is to show the committee* that is is not just one, two or three cases that are an exception to most court cases, but nearly all domestic abuse cases that enter family court evolve in a similar manner where a protective mother's allegations of abuse are either ignored or used against her as a diagnosis of Parental Alienation.

SAMPLE TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF SB 5

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein, and members of the committee.

My name is [your full name], I am from [town] and a member of [Connecticut Protective Moms](#). I am a protective mother trying to keep myself and my [number of children and ages] children safe from continued

harm after leaving my abuser. Even though I have physically left my abuser, there is harm and danger with the continued post separation abuse while I am in Connecticut Family Court Proceedings. I am testifying in favor of [\[Bill number\]](#).

In protecting victims-survivors from post-separation abuse, family court professionals should listen to the voices of victims-survivors themselves. Consider that the victim-survivor probably knows best. We've been living through this for years.

In [\[year\]](#), we filed for divorce/child custody/protective order and have been in [\[name of court \(s\)\]](#) for [\[this many years\]](#) and to date we have over [\[number of\]](#) pleadings in our case docket. In these past [\[how many years\]](#), we have had the following court appointed [\[DO NOT name the names of the court professionals in your case: Refer to them as Lawyer 1, Lawyer 2, GAL 1\]](#) Lawyers, GAL, Forensic Evaluator, Family Relations Counselors, Forensic Accountants, Expert Witnesses in our case.

The abuse from my ex partner/husband has been ongoing since [\[year\]](#) and has escalated since leaving. He continues to exert control over me and our children through a pattern of Coercive Control tactics which are meant to intimidate and subjugate us.

While domestic violence was redefined under PA 21-78 Jennifers' Law to include Coercive Control, I have personally found that family court professionals are either ignoring the new law in my case or have no knowledge or training in the area of domestic abuse, including how it impacts children. In fact, Coercive control, especially litigation and financial abuse, [\[Refer to this backgrounder on Legal Abuse for language. If financial, refer to these resources on Financial Abuse\]](#). is continuing to be used as a weapon of victimization in the family courtroom, all while being done so under the guise of "due process" for the abuser.

What family court professionals need to understand is that these “high conflict” cases are really red flag cases for ongoing Interpersonal Violence (IPV) with an abuser continuing post separation abuse. The family court invalidates my allegations of abuse and invalidates what my children and I have experienced, and keeps us tethered to our abuser.

Funding needs to be dedicated to in-depth professional education on domestic abuse and coercive control for Judges and ALL family court professionals. This particular training needs to be delivered by experts who are highly trained in coercive control, child abuse, how domestic abuse affects children, and by those who have spent years in academics or clinical positions researching specialized family court abuse issues and working directly with those victimized.

Connecticut court professionals should be trained by neutral authorities, both local and national. Such experts and organizations right here in Connecticut include [Dr. Chistine Cocchiola, DSW, LCSW](#), [Evan Stark, PhD](#), the author of Coercive Control, and David Mandel of the [Safe and Together Institute](#). On a national level there are many resources, such as [Peter Jaffe, PhD](#), [Joan Meier, JD](#) at GW Law and the [National Family Violence Law Center](#) (NFVLC), The [Institute of Violence, Abuse and Trauma](#) (IVAT), and the [American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children \(APSAC\)](#). Without proper training, family courts will continue to prolong avoidable harms to Connecticut domestic violence victims, including children.

One of the most telling studies to be published by Daniel Saunders, PhD, from the University of Michigan. (read the full [Saunders Study here.](#))

- *Survivors are placed in a no-win situation:* If they do not report abuse, then protections for them and solid grounds for custody are not available; yet reporting the abuse may be viewed as raising false allegations in order to gain advantage in divorce proceedings (Dore, 2004). Research shows that parents who raise concerns about child

sexual abuse can be severely sanctioned for doing so (Faller & DeVoe, 1995). The sanctions include loss of custody to the alleged offender, restricted visitation, and court orders not to report further abuse or take the child to a therapist (Faller & DeVoe, 1995; Neustein & Goetting, 1999; Neustein & Leshner, 2005; Voices of Women, 2008).

- *Even if domestic violence is detected*, it is often ignored as a factor important in determining custody and visitation arrangements.
- *The use of the label “parental-alienation”* can also place battered women in a no-win situation.
- As noted in the gender bias reports, *patriarchal attitudes seem to play a major role in the treatment of battered women*. Clear evidence demonstrates connections between sexist beliefs (patriarchal norms) and blaming battered women for their abuse (Saunders et al., 1987). Such attitudes are likely related to minimizing abuse or doubting the veracity of abuse reports.
- Underlying the patriarchal beliefs and victim blaming are likely to be *deeper, “core” beliefs (i.e. general, value-laden beliefs) about justice and equality*.
- *An evaluation of the judges education program* “Enhancing Judicial Skills in Domestic Violence Cases,” developed by the *National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the Family Violence Prevention Fund*, showed that *judges overestimated their skills* and competence prior to the training (Jaffe, 2010). Six months after training, the majority of judges saw specific behavior changes in the areas of victim safety, batterer accountability, and judicial leadership.

The most dangerous time for a victim of abuse is when she tries to leave. [Share a brief timeline of when your abuse started and what occurred and if it escalated when you decided to finally leave. Did your partner said he would take the children away from you and take custody of the children away if you leave? Put that here].

[Refer to this resource for more [information on using children as pawns](#) to victimize you in family court.]

[How would this law have helped you?]

[Do you have a personal experience to share?]

[Are you a survivor, or do you know someone who has been a domestic abuse victim of Coercive Control/post separation abuse in family court?]

[Then, explain why the proposed legislation is needed.]

[You may include your own facts you believe are convincing reasons to support the bill.]

End your testimony with something to the effect of:

I ask that you favorably report [\[Bill number\]](#) out of committee so that the General Assembly can vote to strengthen our approach to keep domestic abuse victims and their children safe while in family court proceedings.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[\[Your full name or CPM Mom \(birth year\) i.e. CPM Mom 1975\]](#)

[\[Your Town\]](#)