

**Testimony of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz**  
**Human Services Committee**  
**March 13, 2007**

Good Afternoon Chairman Harris, Chairman Villano and members of the Human Services Committee. For the record, my name is Susan Bysiewicz and I am the Secretary of the State. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding a bill on your public hearing agenda that I strongly support.

**S.B.# 1343: AN ACT CONCERNING COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT**

It is timely that this Committee is debating the merits of compassionate care during a time when our General Assembly is in the midst of crafting proposals that would ensure health care access for our uninsured residents. Both of these public policy initiatives essentially share the same goal: ensure that our residents have access to health care that is badly needed.

As a mother of two girls and as a longtime advocate for women's rights, I firmly believe that women and girls who survive rape deserve nothing less than compassionate care. Compassionate care includes making sure that all rape survivors have the information and access to care and treatment that they need on site at the hospital that they turn to for help. This includes providing emergency contraception to prevent a pregnancy from rape.

I have had the opportunity to speak with many victims of sexual assault as I introduced my initiative to establish an Address Confidentiality Program in my office. The trauma that these women and girls faced should not be further compounded by making the victim feel that she is asking for something that she does not deserve or by placing the burden on her to make sure that she goes to the right hospital for care. In the aftermath of a rape, victims suffer a whole host of emotions and placing barriers on their access to proper care will only belittle their experience and cause further stress and embarrassment. It is difficult enough for these women and girls to come forward and any additional obstacles they must face may cause them to hesitate or question themselves. If either of my daughters were ever in this unfortunate situation, I would expect no less that this General Assembly ensure that they or any victim receive compassionate care.

The outstanding question is do we want our residents to have emergency treatment as soon as possible. This Committee and the General Assembly must answer this question in the coming months. The health care needs of the patient must come first in any emergency. Given that offering emergency contraception as soon as possible after rape is the medical standard of care for the nation's leading medical associations, Connecticut women and girls deserve no less.

Providing emergency contraception at all of Connecticut's hospitals will not only ensure that rape victims are given the compassionate care and psychological relief they deserve, but will guarantee that they are not denied health care options based on where they live, the hospital to which they are taken, or the personal beliefs of the hospital or individual physician or nurse.

I am very cognizant of how public policy affects ethical and religious beliefs of both the caregiver and the patient. Without question, the religious or moral beliefs of a caregiver cannot be allowed to obstruct a patient's access to care.

In order to ensure that all hospitals provide compassionate care to victims of sexual assault, I support the provision of the bill that requires all hospitals that receive federal funds to provide the same standard of care. Not only should all publicly funded hospitals offer and provide it, the General Assembly should ensure that they do so.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and I am available to answer any questions that you may have.