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Testimony – Assembly Budget & Appropriations Committee

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Chairpersons Pou & Greenwald and members of the committee, my name is Regina Podhorin and as the Executive Director of NJCASA I would like to thank you for this opportunity to present the critical concerns of the 22 member programs of the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA). The system of care for victims of sexual assault and their family members has been working on the edge of financial stability for many years in NJ and has been chronically under-funded. Recent Victim Assistance Grant cuts for 7 of the 22 rape care programs and flat funding for the remaining centers has made it virtually impossible for programs to sustain any reasonable level of 24 hour core services for victims.

Rape Care programs provide 24 hour hotline response, 24 hour crisis accompaniment and individual and group counseling for survivors and their family members. An extremely conservative estimate of minimal staff costs for these 3 core services is \$156,727 per program. This does not include facility costs, telephones, supplies or normal overhead costs like audit and payroll services. For high population counties and/or areas serving high number of survivors and family members the costs are easily double that estimate. There is no doubt that the true value of core services in each county is now from \$200,000 to \$300,000 per year.

Current base funding for direct services from the Division on Women averages under \$45,000 for each program in the state for a total state line item of just over \$1 million dollars. Less than half the programs in the state receive additional federal funding for direct service through the competitive grant process (Victim Assistance Grants and VAWA funding) and this additional funding ranges from \$20,000 to \$60,000 for each of the 10 programs funded. Current federal funding through the Division on Women (an additional \$45,000 per program) is restricted to prevention and community education activities and cannot be used for direct services.

The Governor's budget for FY'06/07 (page 15 of the budget brief) notes a commitment to addressing violence against women and the addition of \$1 million dollars to the Department of Law & Public Safety for increased grants. Unfortunately, the fields of domestic violence and sexual assault are often confused and/or seen as one. Funding for core services in sexual assault is completely separate from domestic violence funding. We understand that we will have access to some of this grant increase but the best we can hope for is to replace some of the funding that was cut for seven programs in January 2006. \$1 million dollars spread over 23 domestic violence programs and 22 sexual assault programs is only \$22,000 per program (programs lost between \$60-65,000 from the fund this is meant to replace). That still leaves programs seriously under-funded and in jeopardy.

***Begin by believing that all of us have a role in working toward  
the elimination of sexual violence in our communities.***

Programs are now facing the terrible choice of whether to respond to a new crisis case or cancel a counseling session with a highly vulnerable client. Staff often cannot leave their county for training or meetings since they must remain on call and available to respond quickly to a local hospital or police department. There is virtually no back up system in place should multiple crisis occur at the same time. Staff and volunteer turnover is at an all time high because of these unreasonable demands and the lack of program infrastructure to support this very difficult work.

Providing trained, confidential advocates and skilled counseling services for survivors is essential. Recent research (Campbell 2005) shows that survivors are more likely to report to police, feel less traumatized by the system, and were more likely to receive legal and medical services if they have access to trained confidential rape care advocates. This support will also more quickly start the difficult healing process for survivors and their families.

The bottom line is that NJCASA goes on record that the system of care in NJ requires at least a \$4 million dollar annual investment in direct services. Continued funding at the \$1million level risks severe consequences for victims and the potential further disruption of services in many more counties.

#### **NJCASA Member Services**

- Each year NJCASA member Rape Care Centers:
- Handle over 20,000 calls from survivors, family members and friends in crisis
- Accompany 2500 survivors during medical/forensic exams, to the police station or to court proceedings (24 hours per day, 365 days per year)
- Counsel over 3500 survivors and 1200 family members and friends during the initial healing process.

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