
From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

For Immediate Release February 15, 2002

CONTACT: Larry Perosino 860/509-6259

ADDRESS CONFIDENTIALITY PROGRAM PROPOSED

Secretary of the State would process mail for domestic violence victims

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz outlined her proposed Address Confidentiality Program for victims of crimes such as domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and risk of injury to a minor at a Capitol press conference Friday.

"Address confidentiality can help break the chain that allows abusers to reach their victims by tracking their address through public records," Bysiewicz said. "With this program, victims of abuse will not have to choose between personal safety and exercising their rights, such as voting. Victims of domestic violence and other crimes can limit the threat of danger in their lives and create a safer existence for themselves and their children."

Under the program, participants would be assigned a substitute mailing address to protect a victim's actual location. State and municipal government agencies would be required to use the new address in their official records, including for freedom of information requests and voting purposes.

"Connecticut should stay a leader in stopping domestic violence and protecting victims of abuse," said Attorney General Richard Blumenthal. "This program is another strong step in safeguarding victims against further threat of abuse, stalking, and other forms of domestic violence."

Through address protection for work and school locations a victim is also better able to pursue career and educational goals, which are critical to establishing financial independence from their abuser. Use of the substitute address for private correspondence would be at the participant's discretion.

"Domestic violence address confidentiality just makes sense," said Senate President Pro Tempore Kevin Sullivan (D-West Hartford). "Connecticut should join all the other states that have taken this step to protect victims of domestic violence, stalking, sexual assault or injury to a minor from being bureaucratically exposed to harm."

The Connecticut Department of Public Safety reported 19,536 arrests and 17,033 victims of crimes related to family violence in 2000. Address confidentiality programs are currently active in nine states including California, Massachusetts and Vermont. Washington started the nation's first such program in 1991 and has since registered about 2000 participants.

"This legislative session, we must continue with our commitment in helping women escape the terror of an abusive relationship," House Deputy Majority Leader Patricia Widlitz (D-Branford, Guilford) said. "With the help of our

Secretary of the State, we will work to make sure victims have another way to stop the cycle of violence and seek safety in a new life - a life without the fear of cruelty and abuse."

Bysiewicz partnered with legislators, women's rights and victim advocacy groups as well as law enforcement agencies to develop the program through a Connecticut Law Revision Commission study.

"My service on the Law Revision Commission has enabled me to learn first hand of the success of address confidentiality programs in other jurisdictions," said Senator Andrew Roraback (R-Goshen). "The time has come to offer at risk individuals in Connecticut these important protections."

"We believe this is a critically important proposal that will provide sexual assault, domestic violence and stalking victims some protection which will help them and their families to find some safety in their lives," said Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services Executive Director Gail Burns-Smith.

Other supporters of the Address Confidentiality Program include the Office of Victim Services, Office of the Victim Advocate, Chief State's Attorney, Chief Public Defender, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund.

Bysiewicz' proposal is currently being considered by the Legislature's Judiciary Committee.

"We as a government have a constitutional mandate to protect victims of crime throughout the criminal justice process," said Judiciary House Chair Michael Lawlor (D-Branford, East Haven). "An address confidentiality program is long overdue and can serve as an important tool as we continue to search for new ways to protect our citizens."

##