



# *Camden County Women's Center*

Domestic Violence Safe House  
Outreach & Support Center

#015

**24 Hour Domestic Violence Hotline: 856-227-1234**

---

April, 8, 2015

The Camden County Women's Center writes in support of the NJCBW's position on the proposed UMHDPP and their concerns relating to Victim Counselor Privilege, and the rights and safety of domestic violence/sexual assault victims. We submit our comment that the Victim-Counselor Privilege statute (VCP) should not be included in the Rules of Evidence Committee's proposed Unified Mental Health Service Provider Privilege Statute (UMHSPP).

New Jersey's Victim Counselor Privilege (VCP) is so different in nature and purpose than mental health privileges such as psychologist or social worker privileges that it does not belong with a mental health privilege of any kind. In fact, a "victim counselor" is not a profession. It was created to describe a relationship for the purpose of creating a privilege for victims of crimes and is defined only in the Victim Counselor Privilege statute. It does not exist outside this statute as mental health professions exist outside their privilege statutes. The Camden County Women's Center believes that is why other states that have both a victim counselor privilege and a unified mental health privilege, excluded their VCP from their unified mental health privilege, including the state of California.

Most importantly, the Camden County Women's Center agrees that the inclusion of the VCP would weaken its "absolute" nature potentially compromising the safety of victims of domestic violence and other crimes. Domestic and sexual violence programs are routinely subpoenaed for victim records by defense attorneys seeking to discredit the victim. New Jersey's strong VCP has prevented the piercing of privilege in the vast majority of these cases. Should a UMHSPP result in a number of cases being pierced, this in turn will result in a reluctance by many victims to talk about their abuse, the opposite impact intended by the VCP. Camden County Women's Center respectfully asks the Rules of Evidence Committee to reconsider their position and exclude the VCP from their proposed MHSPPS.

Respectfully,

Nancy Hutchinson

Program Supervisor, Camden County Women's Center

---

**Domestic Violence Safe House**  
office ph.: 856-227-1800 • fax: 856-227-1261  
PO Box 1459 Blackwood, New Jersey 08012

---

**Domestic Violence Outreach & Support Center**  
office ph.: 856-963-5668 • fax: 856-964-4998  
311 Market Street Camden, New Jersey 08102