

CHAPTER 481B
Hawaii Court Rules

Rule 505.5 Victim-counselor privilege.

(a) Definitions. As used in this rule:

(1) A communication is "confidential" if not intended to be disclosed to third persons other than those to whom disclosure would be in furtherance of the provision of counseling or treatment services to the victim or those reasonably necessary for the transmission of the communication.

(2) "Domestic violence victims' program" means any refuge, shelter, office, safe home, institution, or center established for the purpose of offering assistance to victims of abuse through crisis intervention, medical, legal, or support counseling.

(3) "Sexual assault crisis center" means any office, institution, or center offering assistance to victims of sexual assault and the families of such victims through crisis intervention, medical, legal, or support counseling.

(4) "Social worker" means a person who has received a master's degree in social work from a school of social work accredited by the Council on Social Work Education.

(5) A "victim" is a person who consults a victim counselor for assistance in overcoming any adverse emotional or psychological effect of sexual assault, domestic violence, or child abuse.

(6) A "victim counseling program" is any activity of a domestic violence victims' program or a sexual assault crisis center that has, as its primary function, the counseling and treatment of sexual assault, domestic violence, or child abuse victims and their families, and that operates independently of any law enforcement agency, prosecutor's office, or the department of human services.

(7) A "victim counselor" is either a sexual assault counselor or a domestic violence victims' counselor. A sexual assault counselor is a person who is employed by or is a volunteer in a sexual assault crisis center, has undergone a minimum of thirty-five hours of training and who is, or who reports to and is under the direct control and supervision of, a social worker, nurse, psychiatrist, psychologist, or psychotherapist, and whose primary function is the rendering of advice, counseling or assistance to victims of sexual assault. A domestic violence victims' counselor is a person who is employed by or is a volunteer in a domestic violence victims' program, has undergone a minimum of twenty-five hours of training and who is, or who reports to and is under the direct control and supervision of, a direct service supervisor of a domestic violence victims' program, and whose primary function is the rendering of advice, counseling, or assistance to victims of abuse.

(b) General rule of privilege. A victim has a privilege to refuse to disclose and to prevent any other person from disclosing confidential communications made to a victim counselor for the purpose of counseling or treatment of the victim for the emotional or psychological effects of sexual assault, domestic violence, or child abuse or neglect, and to refuse to provide evidence

that would identify the name, location, or telephone number of a safe house, abuse shelter, or other facility that provided temporary emergency shelter to the victim.

(c) Who may claim the privilege. The privilege may be claimed by the victim, the victim's guardian or conservator, or the personal representative of a deceased victim. The person who was the victim counselor at the time of the communication is presumed to have authority to claim the privilege but only on behalf of the victim.

(d) Exceptions. There is no privilege under this rule:

(1) Perjured testimony by victim. If the victim counselor reasonably believes that the victim has given perjured testimony and a party to the proceeding has made an offer of proof that perjury may have been committed.

(2) Physical appearance and condition of victim. In matters of proof concerning the physical appearance and condition of the victim at the time of the alleged crime.

(3) Breach of duty by victim counselor or victim counseling program. As to a communication relevant to an issue of breach of duty by the victim counselor or victim counseling program to the victim.

(4) Mandatory reporting. To relieve victim counselors of any duty to refuse to report child abuse or neglect under chapter 350, domestic abuse under chapter 586, or abuse of a vulnerable adult under part X of chapter 346, and to refuse to provide evidence in child abuse proceedings under chapter 587A.

(5) Proceedings for hospitalization. For communications relevant to an issue in proceedings to hospitalize the victim for mental illness or substance abuse, or in proceedings for the discharge or release of a victim previously hospitalized for mental illness or substance abuse.

(6) Examination by order of court. If the court orders an examination of the physical, mental, or emotional condition of a victim, whether a party or a witness, communications made in the course thereof are not privileged under this rule with respect to the particular purpose of which the examination is ordered unless the court orders otherwise.

(7) Condition an element of claim or defense. As to a communication relevant to the physical, mental, or emotional condition of the victim in any proceeding in which the victim relies upon the condition as an element of the victim's claim or defense or, after the victim's death, in any proceeding in which any party relies upon the condition as an element of the party's claim or defense.

(8) Proceedings against the victim counselor. In any administrative or judicial proceeding in which the competency or practice of the victim counselor or of the victim counseling program is at issue, provided that the identifying data of the victims whose records are admitted into evidence shall be kept confidential unless waived by the victim. The administrative agency, board or commission shall close to the public any portion of a proceeding, as necessary to protect the confidentiality of the victim.

[L 1992, c 217, §5; am L 1993, c 193, §2; am L 2008, c 154, §27; am L 2010, c 135, §7]

Revision Note

Only the subsection amended is compiled in this Supplement.

RULE 505.5 COMMENTARY

This rule, which resembles victim-counselor privilege provisions now in existence in some twenty states, e.g., Cal. Evid. Code §§1035 through 1037.7 (1992), encourages and protects the counseling of emotionally distressed victims of violent crimes by according privilege status to confidential communications made in the course of the counseling process. In adopting a similar law, N.J. Stat. Ann. §2A:84A-22.13 and 22.15 (1991), the New Jersey Legislature declared that the "counseling of victims is most successful when the victims are assured [that] their thoughts and feelings will remain confidential and will not be disclosed without their permission." The present provision proceeds upon just such a policy basis.

RULE 505.5 SUPPLEMENTAL COMMENTARY

The Act 154, Session Laws 2008 amendment replaced the term "dependent adult" with the term "vulnerable adult" in subsection (d)(4), with reference to chapter 346, part X. Act 154 amended chapter 346, part X, by, among other things, expanding the category of adults eligible for adult protective services by replacing the term "dependent adult" with the less restrictive term "vulnerable adult".

Law Journals and Reviews

Empowering Battered Women: Changes in Domestic Violence Laws in Hawai`i. 17 UH L. Rev. 575.

Case Notes

When a statutory privilege interferes with a defendant's constitutional right to cross-examine, then, upon a sufficient showing by the defendant, the witness' statutory privilege must, in the interest of the truth-seeking process, bow to the defendant's constitutional rights. 101 H. 172, 65 P.3d 119.