

Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:

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Laura Cordes



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7356

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Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

96 Pitkin Street
East Hartford, CT 06108
Phone/TTY: 860-282-9881
Fax: 860-291-9335
www.connsacs.org

Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.

Laura Cordes, Director of Policy & Advocacy

HB 7356 AN ACT CONCERNING OFF-CAMPUS ASSAULT & BATTERY

Submitted to the Committee on Education
Public Hearing, March 12, 2007

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee on Education, my name is Laura Cordes. I am the Director of Policy & Advocacy with the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide association of nine community-based rape crisis centers in Connecticut. Our mission is to end sexual violence and ensure high quality, comprehensive and culturally competent sexual assault victim services.

During fiscal year 2005-2006, CONNSACS' community-based program staff and volunteers provided services to 4,326 sexual assault victims and their families. Our member centers also provided risk reduction and prevention education to more than 46,000 children and youth and to over 8,000 members of the general public and training for nearly 3,400 professionals, including law enforcement personnel.

We work with many adolescent victims and their parents who struggle with public school systems regarding protecting their child from further harassment or stress when a sexual assault has occurred off campus. A victim assaulted by a peer may be subject to harassment not only from the offender and his friends but from the student body at large.

Currently, school systems struggle with how to handle cases where a perpetrator and victim are in the same school. Some will go forward with expulsion of the offender, while others maintain that nothing can be done until an offender is convicted and even then, many school systems are reluctant to go forward because of the possibility of civil action. Case law regarding school systems' ability to expel students when a crime has happened off campus is ambiguous at best.

We have worked with several victims and their families who have been forced to remove their children from schools to protect them from harassment. Often when school systems are approached by parents concerned for their child's safety, they suggest that the parents to remove the child victim. This is not the solution. Victimized once, children should not have to leave school in order to feel safe.

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We believe that HB 7356 will give school boards an additional tool to protect students. We caution, however, that in no circumstance should a student who is a victim of an off campus assault by another student be subject to expulsion or considered “disruptive of another student’s educational performance.”

Thank you for the opportunity to present our position and for your consideration. Should you have questions with regard to CONNSACS’ position, please feel free to contact me.