

In Support of SB 1457: Act Concerning Consensual Sexual Activity Between Adolescents Close in Age to Each Other

Submitted to the Judiciary Committee

April 4, 2007

My name is Karen—I'm a counselor and volunteer at the Women's Center of Greater Danbury. I do individual counseling, group counseling, and I staff the domestic violence and sexual assault hotlines; I spend my time helping women who have been victimized. I'm also the mother of a high school junior who is in love with a freshman girl.

CT Statutory rape laws are intended to prevent victimization of boys and girls who cannot legally consent to sexual activity because they are younger than 16. The law was meant to stop predatory adults, but too often it ensnares teens who are only a few years older than their boyfriends or girlfriends.

As it stands now, teens from the ages of 14 through 19 attend the same high schools, and romantic relationships are inevitable across those years—in fact, 48% of Connecticut high school students are sexually active. A senior who dates a freshman in CT—even if there is no sexual intercourse—can be accused of and prosecuted for statutory rape. Sexual conduct between consenting teens may be ill advised, but it should not be criminalized. Several states already recognize this: North Carolina requires a 5 year gap between partners, and Pennsylvania, Vermont, Maine, Colorado, NY, and Wyoming require a 4 year gap before sexual activity is considered criminal. Connecticut's age gap of 24 months is one of the smallest in the country.

My 17-year-old son is dating a 14-year-old girl. They are chaperoned every moment they're together, and I've discussed the law with them, but I'm still concerned. If my son were to make out with his girlfriend, he could be charged and convicted of risk of injury to a minor. If they were to have sexual intercourse he could be charged and convicted of sexual assault in the second degree and face prison time and possible registry on the sex offender list.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, of August 2005, nearly one third of the statutory rape incidents involve boyfriend/girlfriend relationships. When we pass this amendment, I'll continue to chaperone—that's what mothers do...but I won't worry that a break-up or make out session could cost my son his freedom and his future.

Thank you for your consideration.

Karen