



**Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.**

---

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

Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
**In Support of HB 5165 AN ACT CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL  
GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS**

Anna Doroghazi, Director of Public Policy and Communication  
Program Review and Investigations Committee Public Hearing, March 1, 2010

Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and honorable members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee, my name is Anna Doroghazi, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Communications for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide association of Connecticut's nine community-based rape crisis programs. Our mission is to end sexual violence and provide comprehensive, culturally-competent victim services. We believe that education is crucial for ending sexual violence, and we therefore support HB 5165 AN ACT CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS.

If there is a single statistic that sums up the educational crisis at hand in our nation's high schools, it is this: nearly half of high school students believe that rape is okay. An attitude and behavior assessment survey of high school students in Wisconsin found that 44% of teens believe that if a girl had sex with a guy before, it is not rape if he forces her to have sex later. 42% believe that if a girl or guy have been drinking and are a little drunk, then it is not sexual assault if he forces or coerces her to have sex. 19% believe that if a guy and a girl have been dating for at least six months, he has a right to expect and force her to have sex.<sup>1</sup> These attitudes represent a deficiency of basic knowledge akin to not knowing the alphabet or not knowing how to count to three.

The same survey found that:

- 48% of teens believe that if a girl says yes to sex and then changes her mind and the guy has sex with her anyway, it is not sexual assault.
- 41% of teens believe that if a man forces his wife to have sex, it is not rape.
- 18% of teens believe that if a guy buys a girl dinner, he has a right to have sex with her.

One of the goals of education is to prepare students to become productive, responsible citizens. Productive, responsible citizens do not think that rape is acceptable. Preparing students for continued education and careers is vitally important, but they must also be prepared to make decisions about their own bodies and about how to respect other people.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Attitude and Behavior Assessment Among Wisconsin High School Students." Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2000.

HB 5165 would expand high school graduation requirements to include one-half credit in comprehensive health education. Health education that includes accurate, age-appropriate information about sexual assault, dating violence, and appropriate interpersonal boundaries would give students an opportunity to learn facts about the issues that they already confront every day. Teenagers between the ages of sixteen and nineteen are three and a half times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault.<sup>2</sup> While some of this violence is at the hands of adults, many teens are the victims of their peers: 23% of all sex offenders are under the age of eighteen. Education changes attitudes. Attitudes change behavior.

For the 12% of girls<sup>3</sup> and 5% of boys<sup>4</sup> who experience sexual victimization before age 18, health class might be the first place where they hear that what happened to them was not their fault. It might be the first time they realize that they are not alone, and that help is available. Health education could give young men and young women the opportunity to evaluate their dangerous attitudes before those attitudes turn into criminal behaviors. CONNSACS is a strong proponent of primary prevention, which aims to end sexual assault by addressing oppressive ideas and beliefs before they become violent actions. Sexual assault ruins lives, and preventing sexual violence is one of the most important things that we can do to ensure that children have a chance at an education and a career.

One-half credit of comprehensive health education is a start, but it is not enough. CONNSACS supports HB 5165 but asks that it be expanded so that one full credit of health education is mandatory for high school graduation. Half of this full-credit requirement could be completed in middle school at a time when young adolescents are beginning to develop their understanding of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.

Sexual violence is an unfortunate reality for many Connecticut high school students. The health education requirement in HB 5165 AN ACT CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS is a small step toward addressing a huge problem, and I hope that the Committee will support its passage.

Thank you.

Anna Doroghazi  
[anna@connsacs.org](mailto:anna@connsacs.org)

---

<sup>2</sup> United States. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. National Crime Victimization Survey. Washington DC: GPO, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Schoen, Davis, Collins et al. The Commonwealth Fund Survey of the Health of Adolescent Girls. New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> Schoen, Davis, DesRoches et al. The Health of Adolescent Boys: Commonwealth Fund Survey Findings. New York: The Commonwealth Fund, 1998.