

Testimony of Mary DeLucia  
Advocate, Susan B. Anthony Project  
**In Support of HB 5489 AN ACT CONCERNING SECONDARY SCHOOL REFORM**  
Education Committee Public Hearing  
Monday, March 15, 2010

Only 14 out of 50 states do not require a health education credit before high school graduation, and Connecticut is one of them. 23% of all sex offenders are under the age of 18,<sup>1</sup> and teens between the ages of 16 and 19 are three and a half times more likely than the general population to be victims of rape and attempted rape.<sup>2</sup> Mandating a health class in schools to educate students about sexual assault can decrease the likelihood of sexual violence in this specific population. As a result, this younger demographic will have a knowledge about what consent is and will be able to enter the future workforce helping create a healthy economy.

As an advocate at Susan B. Anthony Project (SBAP), I have counseled many survivors who have been sexually assaulted as children and teenagers. These survivors have thought that they did something to cause being raped; that the sexual assault was their fault. Survivors of sexual assault often think that it is normal to be coerced into having sex. Mandating health education in schools will give students more information and knowledge to understand that sexual assault is never the victim's fault and that sexual coercion is not normal sexual activity.

Our community education team at SBAP has given presentations on the myths of sexual assault to middle and high school students. One myth in which students have trouble understanding its falseness is: "People who are dressed provocatively, drinking too much, or go to someone's house alone are sending mixed messages; if they are sexually assaulted it is their own fault". The students think that if a young woman dresses in short skirts and skimpy tops then it is okay to have sex with her. Our community educators often spend most of the presentation explaining to the students that being dressed a certain way is not the same as giving consent. Having a health class that includes age-appropriate information about sexual assault will allow students to have a place to talk about what consent really is and understand that just because they want to dress a certain way does not necessarily mean they are looking to have sex.

For those survivors who have been assaulted as children, school may be the only place where they can learn that what happened to them was not their fault and that they do not have to keep it a secret. Our community educators at SBAP perform a "Safe Touch" puppet show with the younger elementary school students to give them age-appropriate knowledge about child sexual assault. A few days after each puppet show it is common for our community educators to receive phone calls from the school social workers about

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<sup>1</sup> United States. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Sexual Assault of Young Children as Reported to Law Enforcement: Victim, Incident, and Offender Characteristics. Washington DC: GPO, 2000.

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

children who have disclosed child sexual assault. How will kids ever be aware of what sexual assault is if they are not learning about it at home and schools are not teaching them about it? By not talking about sexual assault to our students we are just continuing a cycle of sexual violence.

Unfortunately sexual assault is all too common in Connecticut. Having a course in schools where students can learn more about what sexual assault is can break the cycle of sexual violence; making students aware about the importance of giving and getting consent, and giving them resources to help them if they had been victims of sexual assault in the past. A survey of high school students in Wisconsin found that 48% of teens believe that if a girl says yes to sex and then changes her mind and the guy still has sex with her, it is not sexual assault.<sup>3</sup> That is very close to half the population! Let's not let Connecticut students be so misled about what sexual assault is. HB 5489 is just asking for one credit of health education which includes age-appropriate information about sexual assault to be completed in either middle or high school. The bill is not asking for a lot, just a small step in helping improve the minds of our youth: the future of our society.

Thank you.

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<sup>3</sup> "Attitude and Behavior Assessment Among Wisconsin High School Students." Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault, 2000.