

Testimony of Connecticut College Consortium Against Sexual Assault
In support of SB 847, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES

Jessica Champagne, College Advocate, The Rape Crisis Center of Milford
Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, February 10, 2011

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Committee, my name is Jessica Champagne, and I am writing on behalf of the Connecticut College Consortium Against Sexual Assault (CCASA) in support of SB 847. The Consortium is comprised of representatives from Connecticut colleges and universities, as well as individuals from community services and programs who work to improve the response to and prevention of sexual violence. CCASA members include staff from residential life, student activities, campus-based counseling centers, women's centers, and advocates from sexual assault crisis centers.

CCASA is committed to providing a forum for campus faculty, administrators, and students to address the issues of sexual assault and other forms of violence against women on college and university campuses; and to share information, strategies, ideas and resources in order to strengthen and support each institution's work to end sexual violence. Our work as a consortium would be favorably impacted by the passage of SB 847.

The proposed goals of SB 847 touch upon many salient issues that greatly affect all members of a college community. SB 847 represents best practices in victim services, including clear and easily accessible sexual assault misconduct policies, access to campus resources for victims of crime, primary prevention and awareness training for all faculty and staff, bystander intervention training for students, and collaboration with outside service agencies such as local rape crisis centers and police departments. The passage of a detailed and comprehensive state-wide bill would send a clear message to students that sexual assault education and prevention is a priority.

Although each piece of SB 847 is beneficial and necessary in working to end sexual violence on college campuses, one of the greatest assets of the bill is that, if passed, it will require that all Connecticut colleges have some level of consistency in the handling of disclosures of sexual assault. As it stands, it is up to each individual college to create and enforce a sexual assault misconduct policy. Many times, the result is an unclear, outdated policy that oftentimes is not victim-centered. The way that things currently stand is not advantageous to anyone. A strong, easily accessible, and consistent policy would assist *all* members of a college community in identifying sexual assault and locating the proper resources that could provide services. Faculty and staff should know what is expected of them, as well as which guidelines they need to follow should a student disclose being a victim of sexual assault. If the bill is passed, it would greatly assist administrators on campus in complying with the federal reporting requirements outlined in the Clery Act.

Moreover, students deserve to have access to an easily understandable outline of the different ways to report an assault, what the college judicial or disciplinary process entails, contact information for various confidential resources on campus, as well as the contact

information for community resources—including police departments, hospitals, and local rape crisis centers. The creation of a strong and consistent policy would increase student awareness of the disciplinary action that the school will take against students who perpetrate acts of violence, hold perpetrators accountable, promote a collaborative and coordinated response to incidents of sexual assault, increase student awareness about services available to victims of crime, and help victims feel empowered throughout the reporting process.

This legislation also focuses on primary prevention—including training and education to be provided to all incoming students as well as all new faculty and staff. This proponent of the bill is essential in ensuring that the information outlined in college's sexual misconduct policy is disseminated. Research has shown that incoming first-year students within their first 6-8 weeks of being on campus are victims of sexual violence at a rate that is higher than any other time during their college career. The Consortium regularly shares ideas for programming during this time frame, known as 'The Red Zone', however requiring that all new students attend a primary prevention program would again, ensure that every individual is getting this information.

As a group of professionals in the field, we are truly hopeful and optimistic that the passage of SB 847 would help us reach our goal of creating safer, more informed college communities in a way that would significantly impact the health and well-being of students in the state of Connecticut.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 847.

Sincerely,

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