

Testimony of Marichris Cariaga
In Support of SB 847 *An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence on College Campuses*
February 10, 2011

Senator Bye, Representative Bye, and members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, I am Marichris Cariaga, a sophomore at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, CT, originally from Norwich, CT and a campus action intern for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. I am testifying in support of SB 847 *An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence on College Campuses*. I offer two brief cases from many that sustain my favor of such an imperative bill.

My freshman year, I enrolled in a one-credit course entitled *First Year Experience* that was advised, but not required for freshmen to take. The course intended to aid in the transition from high school to college-life. One class talked about sexual consent and rape but the line of consent was surprisingly ambiguous to most of us. We were taught what consent was by defining what it is not; thus, rape is any form of penetration without *sober* consent. Most agreed, but a few male students disagreed with the definition. Sobriety, they claimed, was not necessary for consent, but rather a girl saying “yes” or simply her *acting* lascivious (despite impaired judgment) amounted to sexual consent. In a survey of high school students, 56% of girls and 76% of boys believed forced sex was acceptable under some circumstancesⁱ. I believe that including policy that focuses on changing attitudes regarding sexual assault would lead to the elimination of the wrongly held belief of what doesn't constitute sexual violence, and strengthen comprehension of what does.

Take for instance, a situation that involved a *male* student being “roofied” at a frat party. Fact is, the sedated-punch was not intended for him, but for an assumingly vulnerable woman. Regardless, it was a deliberate act intending to take sexual advantage of a student. It has been argued that the individual who has been drugged is at fault because (s)he did not assume *moral responsibility* in making smarter, better decisions. However, it is **not** the victim who is at fault; the fault is of the systemic attitude which assumes that, particularly when it is a woman who has been drinking, that she is a willing sex partnerⁱⁱ. It is unnerving that this common scenario is condoned and allowed to occur *repetitively*, if not regularly, particularly on a campus as wet as mine. The most horrific aspect is the relationship among instances of sexual assault, rape, and intimate partner violence as a result of the loose grasp of where the line of consent lies and the strong beliefs of perpetrators that dismiss sex without sober consent as actually being rape. This does not account for the approximately 50% of *victims* who don't think of sexual assault as rape, particularly when alcohol is involved or there is no sign of physical injuryⁱⁱⁱ. As a result, less than 5% of campus sexual assaults are brought to authorities^{iv}.

In addition, intimate partner violence is often dismissed because it is believed that sexual assault is something aggravated by strangers, which is highly misleading. Actually, 85% of rapes are committed by a person the victim knows^v; and part of this 85% accounts for date-rape cases. There is often uncertainty of who is to blame in sexual violence cases. Unfortunately, without much attention or open discussion focused on campus sexual assault and intimate partner violence, the silence often leads to the victim's sense of shame and resistance to reach out. Other times, the silence is used as an excuse for a victim of sexual violence to dismiss his/her assault because it was his/her partner who committed the act; or because a controlled substance was involved and impaired judgment automatically excuses “bad choices.” However, if campus staff (ie. professors whom students trust and respect) become highly trained about these issues, it would most likely lessen the likelihood of silencing victims because they will feel more comfortable reporting their assault to a trusted, trained professor who can direct the student.

I advocate implementing strategies that will change current attitudes and beliefs toward sexual assault and intimate partner violence, transmit a solid understanding of what constitutes sexual violence, and eradicate stigmas and/or uneasiness associated with reporting cases. Ultimately, I am advocating for this bill because I personally believe that it should be a priority to ensure that the student body feels secure and safe at all times while attending the university. It will also play a role impacting how students view themselves, their safety, and furthermore, their moral-worth. Please vote to make this happen and support SB847. Thank you.

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i. *Acquaintance Rape: The Hidden Crime, 1991.*

ii. “College Campuses and Rape.”[Online]Available:http://www.crisisconnectioninc.org/sexualassault/college_campuses_and_rape.htm,2002

iii/iv. National Institute for Justice – *Sexual Assault on Campus: What Colleges and Universities are Doing About It* 2002.

v. Ottens, A.J. and Hotelling, K.(2001) *Sexual Violence On Campus: Policies, Programs, and Perspectives*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc.