

Testimony of Women and Families Center
**In Support of SB 847 AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE
ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES**

Norah Cleary, Child Advocate, Women & Families Center
February 10, 2011

Senator Bye, Representative Willis and honorable members of the Committee, my name is Norah Cleary and I am a Counselor/Advocate at Women & Families Center, a member agency of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services. I currently counsel and advocate on behalf of survivors of sexual violence. I am writing to ask for your support of SB 847: An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence on College Campuses.

Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services strongly supports this bill because it addresses both the underlying causes and long-lasting effects of widespread sexual violence on college campuses. Research has revealed startling statistics which show both high rates of sexual assault among college-age women and problematic attitudes among men regarding sexual assault. At least 1 in 4 college women will be the victim of a sexual assault during her academic career. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, at least 80% of all sexual assaults are committed by an acquaintance of the victim. Further, a 2000 study by J. Foubert demonstrated that one in twelve college men admitted to committing acts that met the legal definition of rape.

SB 847 has the potential to establish a framework for Connecticut colleges and universities with which to respond to the epidemic of sexual violence. SB 847 would require transparency in college campus crime reports, a clear mandate which would outline consistency in the handling of sexual assaults and a more holistic, victim-centered approach to the aftermath of university sexual violence crimes. Many of my clients who have survived sexual assaults during their college careers were met with understaffed counseling centers, little information regarding the navigation of the criminal/legal process and insufficient support regarding the judicial process. The uniquely self-contained microcosm of university and college campus life has allowed for many schools to operate their independent judicial processes without accountability.

Many of my clients' stories reflect the lack of comprehensive support services in the aftermath of a sexual assault: dropping out of college due to decreased academic performance or depression, frustration with a lack of options and a lack of strong prevention education programs on campus combines to create a picture of a broken system. What is so powerful about SB 847 is its multi-disciplinary approach to counteract the epidemic of sexual violence. Both education programs that empower students to take an active role in prevention *and* the establishment of consistent policies would serve Connecticut communities best.

I hope that you will join us in supporting SB 847. Thank you.

Norah Cleary, Child Advocate

Women & Families Center
169 Colony Street
Meriden, CT 06451
(203) 235-9297