

Testimony of Devan Cody
In Support of SB 847 An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence On College Campuses
February 10, 2011

Senator Bye, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Devan Cody and I am a senior at the University of Connecticut with permanent residence in Stratford, CT. I have seen and experienced an innumerable amount of sexual violence in my years here, especially with my position as a leader of the Violence Against Women Prevention Program on our campus. My four years on campus and two years with this program have solidified my belief that our campus promotes a rape culture where survivors of sexual violence are silenced by shame and a lack of knowledge about their resources. By "rape culture" I refer to a climate in which rape is desensitized and humored. In looking at casual conversation alone, my peers "rape" exams, "rape" their opponents in sports, and walk down the "rape trail" while denying the accounts of violence on this path. Not only does this conversation offend both survivors and non-survivors, it promotes the acceptance of violence on campus, where rape and assault are seen as a funny joke. This is why I support SB 847 *An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence On College Campuses*, as I believe it would help to open campus dialog on this issue as well as educate all students on their available support systems.

In a workshop I led surrounding sexual consent, peers anonymously wrote down experiences of sexual harassment on campus. Some of these examples include, "I was talking to a group of boys and one of them grabbed my butt, said it was their right to touch because he was a man and I should feel complimented", "My best friend went to sleep one night at our friend's apartment. When she awoke there was a strange boy next to her and her bra and shirt were on the floor", and numerous complaints of cat-calling and inappropriate jokes. There are very few weekends that go by where I do not see or experience inappropriate touching, licking, grabbing, or comments when walking to friends apartments or out at campus bars. This is not to say that this behavior is limited to social activities, as sexual comments and jokes are made in classrooms, at the dining hall, during extracurricular activities, while riding the buses – sexual violence on this campus is everywhere.

Through my work with VAWPP, I have become aware of many startling statistics. We can see that most rapes are not committed by strangers, which is true for those I know who have experienced a rape on campus. Over 90% of the rapes are committed by someone the survivor knows, and 60% of the time it occurs in the survivor's residence. 1 in 4 college women will be the victim of rape or attempted rape during her academic career¹. I am 1 of 4 in an apartment – this statistic rings true for us. 1 in 5 female students report being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner¹¹. Without university mandated regulations that inform survivors and faculty of the resources they deserve to be available to them, young women and men affected by domestic violence and sexual assault will continue to feel as though they should be ashamed of what has happened to them.

Bystander empowerment training on campuses would be incredibly beneficial to our communities. Not only would it help to open up the discussion surrounding sexual violence and help survivors feel more comfortable seeking out community resources, it may reduce the instance of and even stop certain incidents from occurring. In 2008, a woman was stripped and assaulted on the "rape trail" as numerous students passed by, without intervening. Horrific events

such as this could be stopped with the proper conversations emphasizing the ability of all students and peers to be empowered bystanders in their community.

I believe this bill would be a influential as it would notify survivors of their rights, help them follow through with prosecution, and empower themselves as well as fellow peers to stop violence on our campuses. I urge you to support SB 847 *An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence on College Campuses*, as this is a very prevalent and everyday issue that deeply affects our ability to receive an education in peace. Thank you for your time.

Devan Cody

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¹ Fisher, B.S., Cullen, F.T., & Turner, M.G. (2000). *The sexual victimization of college women*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>

¹¹ National Advisory Council on Violence Against Women. (2000). *An agenda for the nation*. Retrieved from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/pr/216277.pdf>