

Testimony in Support of SB 847, An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence on College Campuses

Susan Schnitzer, Director of Contracts and Program Administration
Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County

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Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and members of the Committee, I am Susan Schnitzer, Director of Contracts and Program Administration for The Center for Women and Families in Bridgeport, a dual sexual and domestic violence agency. We are the primary resource for sexual and domestic violence in Eastern Fairfield County, and as such, witness the devastating effects of violence in our communities. Our area hosts three large colleges/universities, and several smaller, and we collaborate with them to ensure the education and safety of their students and staff. We would like to offer our support for SB 847, An Act Concerning the Elimination of Sexual Violence on College Campuses.

I work with faculty and students at the University of Bridgeport, Fairfield University, and Sacred Heart University as, respectively, a campus grant partner, a classroom speaker, and a partner in an annual sexual assault awareness walk. Through these collaborations, I have seen some of the struggles that face both students and university administration when it comes to preventing and responding to sexual violence. Campuses often shy away from discussions of sexual violence, preferring to deal with the issue privately and internally. This tendency can send the wrong message to students, who need to understand that it is okay to talk about sexual assault and that help is available for them. Challenges also arise when working with public safety. There are not always clear policies regarding the relationship between campus safety and law enforcement, and this confusion can result in frustration on behalf of both the victim and the university.

SB 847 takes steps to address both of these challenges. By requiring primary prevention programming and awareness activities on campus, universities will have to openly acknowledge the prevalence of sexual violence in their communities. Though seemingly a small step, it will go a long way in letting students know that violence is not an anomaly, it is not their fault when it occurs, and help is available to them. Creating policies about reporting procedures will also benefit students by requiring universities to clearly define the relationship between campus security and local law enforcement.

Sexual violence is far too common on college campuses, as indicated in the statistics that I am enclosing with my testimony. SB 847 is an important step forward in addressing this issue and ensuring that colleges and universities are prepared to respond to violence and prevent it in the future.

Thank you.

Susan Schnitzer
sschnitzer@cwefec.org

Facts and statistics related to sexual violence on college campuses:

- One in five women will experience rape or attempted rape in their 4-yr college career
- Most survivors of sexual assaults are full-time students. Approximately 1/3 of them are first year students age 17-19.
- In a survey of 412 college students 11.7% of gay/bisexual males and 30.6% of lesbian/bisexual females women indicated they had been forced to have sex against their will at some point in their lives.
- 81% of women who were stalked by a current or former partner were also physically assaulted by that same partner.
- 80-90% of sexual assaults are perpetrated by individuals known to the survivors
- 85% of rapes are committed by a person the victim knows.
- In a recent study by the National Inst. of Justice, survivors of rape knew their attackers as: classmates (35.5%) friends (34.2%) boyfriend/ex-boyfriend (23.7%) acquaintances (2.6%)
- One in twelve college men admitted to committing acts that met the legal definition of rape.
- More than one in five men report “becoming so sexually aroused they cannot stop themselves from having sex” even though the woman did not consent.
- 35% of men report some likelihood that they would rap if they could be assured they would not be caught or punished.
- 81% of on-campus and 84% of off-campus sexual assaults are not reported to the police
- Fewer than 5% of attempted/complete rapes are reported to Law Enforcement.
- Nearly 60% of rapes occur in the survivor’s residence halls.
- 52% of reported rapes/sexual assaults occur after midnight. 37% occur between 6pm and midnight.
- In a survey of students from 171 institutes of higher education, alcohol was involved in 74% of all sexual assaults.
- NCJRS found that historically black 4-yr institutes are doing better than other schools with preventative action/programming.
- 48.8% of college women who were victims of attacks that met the study’s definition of rape did not consider what happened to them rape.