

Testimony of the Women's Center of Greater Danbury
In Support of HB 5031: An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses
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Monica Sievel, M.S., Women's Center Campus Advocate at Western Connecticut State University
Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, March 6, 2012

Senator Bye, Representative Willis and honorable members of the Committee, my name is Melanie Danyliw, Director of Training & Program Development at the Women's Center of Greater Danbury, a member agency of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS) providing sexual assault and domestic violence services throughout upper Fairfield and lower Litchfield counties. I am submitting this testimony with my colleague, Monica Sievel, our Campus Advocate at Western Connecticut State University. In February of 2007, the university entered into a *Memorandum of Understanding* with our agency to develop response protocols and provide education and counseling services on our issues on their campus. Within the context of that experience, we would like to offer our strong support for HB 5031, An Act Concerning Sexual Violence.

Given the prevalence of sexual assault (up to 25% of college females will experience some type of sexual assault during their college career¹) and the fact that few victims report to campus officials – including the police² (fear of reprisal, not wanting people to know, and not defining their assault as “serious enough” being the dominant reasons for not reporting³), it is critical that we foster campus environments that encourage disclosure so that victims can be safe, heal and achieve justice. This is especially crucial given that the immediate and long-term impact of sexual and intimate partner violence can undermine a student's ability to achieve the financial self-sufficiency that is the very goal of higher education. Studies indicate that most victims do not perform at pre-assault academic levels, miss classes more frequently, withdraw from or reduce course load, and, at the extreme, transfer or drop out of school completely.⁴ For those perpetrators who are held accountable, there can be equally devastating consequences. For those who are not held accountable, there is the risk of serial abuse.

HB 5031 addresses these needs: (1) The development of effective, victim-centered response procedures and adequate dissemination of this information to students increase the likelihood that victims will access help and that their friends, to whom victims most often disclose, will be able to encourage safe options. (2) This Act also recognizes that effective response requires not only coordination of services but also adequate training in sexual assault for providers at every entry point to the system, including administration, housing and adjudication. Inadequate system response in itself can compound victimization. (3) The Act encourages education on the issues of sexual and dating violence throughout the college career. Timely risk reduction education in sufficient dosage is critical for all new students. On-going primary prevention and awareness programming, however, by addressing cultural and social norms, empowers students and faculty to create a campus culture that confronts unhealthy behaviors while advancing healthy ones. Such highly visible messages facilitate victims coming forward, firm in the belief that they will be believed and their abusers held accountable. As significant, the environment that primary prevention creates reduces the probability of violence occurring in the first place by promoting healthy values and behaviors.

Thank you for considering this legislation. We hope that you will join us in supporting HB 5031.

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Director of Training & Program Development

Monica Sievel, M.S.
Campus Advocate

¹ Hirsch, Kathleen. "Fraternities of Fear: Gang Rape, Male Bonding, and the Silencing of Women." Ms. Magazine, 2000: 1(2) 52-56.

² Fisher, B.S., F.T. Cullen, and M.G. Turner. "The Sexual Victimization of College Women." Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics and National Institute of Justice, 2000, NCJ 182369.

³ Ibid.

⁴ http://www.aauw.org/act/laf/library/assault_stats.cfm.