



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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**Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
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Good morning Senator Bye, Representative Willis and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

**House Bill No. 5031, An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses
(Support with Proposed Amendment)**

As you are aware, in 1996, Connecticut residents overwhelmingly supported the passage of the Victims' Rights Amendment to our State Constitution. Among the State Constitutional rights of crime victims is the right to be treated with fairness and respect and the right to be reasonably protected from the accused. As such, institutions of higher education in the state have a responsibility to ensure that the rights of crime victims are protected and those working and/or attending the institution are informed and aware of the rights and services available to crime victims should the unfortunate occur.

College campuses are a microcosm of our large community and as such, crime is equally present on our college campuses. Studies have shown that the country's colleges with large concentrations of young women, are at greater risk for rape and other forms of sexual assault than women in the general population or in a comparable age group. According to RAINN, college women are four times more likely to be sexually assaulted. Based on the findings of the Research Report, *The Sexual Victimization of College Women*, conducted by U.S. Department of Justice; Office of Justice Programs; National Institute of Justice¹, it is estimated that the women at a college that has 10,000 female students could experience more than 350 rapes a year—a finding with serious policy implications for college administrators. Yet compared with the National average, those numbers are probably low. Consider this:

- Every 2 minutes, someone in the U.S. is sexually assaulted
- There is an average of 207,754 victims (age 12 or older) of sexual assault each year
- 60% of sexual assaults are not reported to the police
- 15 of 16 rapists will never spend a day in jail²

¹The Sexual Victimization of College Women: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/182369.pdf>

²RAINN <http://www.rainn.org/statistics>

Prior to taking my role as the State Victim Advocate, I was a prosecutor in MA, within a community with several colleges. What struck me as a prosecutor was that more often than not, the crime victim would disappear after the arraignment in crimes involving assaultive behavior that had occurred on college campus. When I would inquire as the status of the victim, I was often told the victim either “relocated” or “choose internal disciplinary” procedures at the institution. Without a victim to testify, the case would fold.

Think of it this way, any business would be concerned if its paying customers were alerted that use of their facilities and/or services, could put them or their children in the path of crime. Colleges and Universities are ultimately, a business, looking to make a profit. The unintended consequence of reporting crimes accurately on our college campuses is that the institutions may lose customers. This has led to certain institutions discouraging reporting of assaultive crimes to authorities. We at the OVA have heard it time and again. The bottom line is we are talking about the safety of our children and our communities.

Add to this equation, the well known fact that sexual assault is one of the most underreported crimes. It is also a well known fact that many victims of sexual assault blame themselves or their own behaviors for the crime committed against them. Considering the well established self blaming that occurs in cases of sexual assault, it is imperative that those who provide services to our students in the aftermath of crime, are cognizant of their responsibilities under the state Constitution and aware of services available for the crime victim. In order for this to occur, two things need to transpire (1) House Bill No. 5031 must become law with the proposed amendment by the OVA and (2) our state colleges and universities have to get honest about crime on campus.

It is unbelievable that, as reported by the two universities below, there was NOT ONE non-forcible sex offense reported for three years. Rather, the statistics below are indicative of a lack of education, experience, knowledge and awareness of sexual assault on college campuses. Interestingly among the sources for obtaining the data below is the Women’s Center, a source I believe that would strongly dispute the accuracy of the statistics.

**Central Connecticut State University
Criminal Offenses – On Campus**

Criminal Offense	2008	2009	2010
Forcible sex offenses (including forcible rape)	6	3	4
Non - forcible sex offenses	0	0	0

Offenses reported to the CCSU Police as well as other campus authorities.

University of Connecticut
Criminal Offenses – On Campus

Criminal Offense	2008	2009	2010
Forcible sex offenses (including forcible rape)	11	7	9
Non - forcible sex offenses	0	0	0

Offenses reported from the UConn Police Department, Office of Community Standards, Department of Residential Life, Women's Center, and Student Activities.

Again in Connecticut, crime victims have state Constitutional rights and as such, our state's colleges and universities are required to ensure that the crime victims' rights are protected and promoted. Therefore, the OVA is asking to amend House Bill No. 5031, to ensure protection of all crime victims as required by the state Constitution.

House Bill No. 5031 is an acknowledgment that institutions of higher education are deficient in policy, training and awareness of crime victimization on campuses. There is a current disconnect between the status of state victims' rights, the treatment by staffing at institutions of higher education and the student crime victims. The attached amendment offered by the Office of the Victim Advocate furthers the intent to ensure that administrators, faculty and students are informed of the rights and services of crime victims and aware of the institutions policies and procedures for reporting criminal activity. The ultimate goal being that our institutions of higher education in the state foster an environment that is safe for its employees and students.

The new Section 2 of the OVA's proposed amendment calls for the establishment of a task force to study and implement a statewide best practices policy for institutions of higher education concerning the student/crime victim population on campuses. In some cases, especially those involving sexual assault, there are many traumas related to the victimization that require consideration for the student/crime victim's safety and ability to continue on the course of their academic studies. The development of a task force to study these issues and make recommendations will address the barriers faced by some student/victims that have suffered due to the lack of awareness and training within the higher education environment.

I strongly urge the Committee to consider the OVA's proposed amendment to enhance the measures of House Bill No. 5031, and in doing so, Connecticut would take the lead in its protections of our college and university students. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



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