



**Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.**

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Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
**In Support of HB 5031 AN ACT CONCERNING SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON  
COLLEGE CAMPUSES**

Bethany Hamilton, Prevention and Training Coordinator  
Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, March 6, 2012

Senator Bye, Representative Willis and honorable members of the Committee, my name is Bethany Hamilton and I am the Prevention and Training Coordinator for Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS). CONNSACS is the statewide coalition of community-based sexual assault crisis programs. I have worked with victims as a sexual assault crisis counselor and currently work with several of Connecticut's colleges and universities as the staff coordinator of the Connecticut College Consortium. I am writing to enthusiastically support HB 5031: An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses.

The impact of this important legislation is two-fold. HB 5031: An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses would simultaneously bolster existing sexual assault policies and services at Connecticut colleges and universities, while also providing support for much needed prevention and awareness programming. This legislation offers a vital and unique opportunity to assist victims of sexual violence *and* to prevent the perpetration of sexual violence through primary prevention education.

HB 5031: An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses would provide much needed guidance for universities to create comprehensive, consistent sexual assault policies, as well as to educate their students, faculty, and staff about the distinct and complex issues of sexual violence and intimate partner violence. Universities strive to provide fair and equitable treatment to both the accused student and the complainant during sexual misconduct hearings; however, the unintended consequences of poor policies, lack of training specific to sexual violence, and a dearth of comprehensive support services often leave students doubly victimized following a sexual assault on campus. This lack of policy and training specific to sexual violence hinders investigations, as well as compromises administrators' ability to provide appropriate support to the victims of sexual violence.

While numerous researchers have documented the prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses, there is less research identifying the lasting effects that an assault has on the victim. Many victims choose to leave campus or drop out of school altogether following a sexual assault. The victims I have worked with who reported their assault to campus officials noted receiving little to no information about their rights, poor administrative follow through and notifications during the process, and insufficient support during, and especially after, the judicial process. Victims often felt that they had few options and were seemingly forced to choose between their emotional well-being and their college careers.

While there is still much work to be done, many campuses around the state of Connecticut have worked diligently to identify best practices, craft policies pertaining to sexual assault, and create coordinated campus responses to victims of sexual violence. The Connecticut College Consortium to End Violence Against Women (CCCEVAW) is an example of a successful collaboration that, like HB 5031, incorporates best practices into the implementation of sexual assault policies and procedures. The CCCEVAW is a group of nine Connecticut colleges and universities collaborating on a 36 month grant from the Department of Justice focused on strengthening sexual assault victim response and the prevention of sexual violence. The main areas of focus for the grant include implementing mandatory freshmen orientation training to include information about sexual assault, forming and sustaining Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs), training campus safety officers in how to respond to victims and assist in investigations, and working with Judicial officers to identify best practices and implement effective policies. Through this grant, the nine participating campuses also launched The Red Flag Campaign, a prevention campaign aimed at curbing the incidences of sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking.

The campus communities involved in the CCCEVAW grant have been enriched through collaboration on the grant. Campuses have been able to strengthen existing sexual assault policies and launch prevention activities on their campuses; however, only nine colleges were able to benefit from this collaboration. One of the greatest benefits of HB 5031: An Act Concerning Sexual Assault on College Campuses is that it would require all Connecticut colleges and universities to have consistent, comprehensive policies following the disclosure of a sexual assault on campus. In combination with training and awareness and prevention activities, the policies proposed in HB 5031 would ensure that all campus communities are safer and more knowledgeable about the prevention of sexual violence.

This legislation would greatly benefit students enrolled in a college or university in Connecticut, as well as all citizens of our state as we continue to work towards the elimination of sexual violence. I hope that you will join us in supporting HB 5031.