



Select Committee on Children

Public Hearing

Tuesday, February 28, 2012

Submitted by Nicole Fournier Gelston

University of Connecticut

Senator Gerratana, Representative Urban, Senator Suzio and Representative Wood, thank you for allowing us to submit written testimony on Raised Senate Bill No. 193, AN ACT CONCERNING MANDATED REPORTERS AND REQUIRING CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORDS CHECKS FOR YOUTH CAMP EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS.

The University of Connecticut has always been committed to ensuring a safe yet welcoming environment for students, employees and visitors, and complying with all relevant laws. The University's Code of Conduct and policies have long set an expectation that the actions of University community members reflect fundamental moral and ethical values, in accordance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations.

To further promote compliance with those expectations, the University adopted the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy. The purpose of this policy is to remind University employees who are "mandated reporters" under the law of their reporting obligations, educate employees as to what constitutes child abuse or neglect under the law, and encourage those employees who are not mandated reporters to report suspected child abuse by reminding them that they are entitled to protection under the law for all such reports made in good faith, even if that report is later found unsubstantiated. In addition, the University has adopted a Sexual Assault Response Policy which requires all university employees, unless otherwise exempted under state law, to report to one of three explicitly designated offices, including the University's Title IX Coordinator, any sexual assault observed by or reported to them. This reporting obligation would necessarily include instances of observed or reported sexual assaults of minors. This policy reflects a difficult but important balance between the needs and concerns of victims and the responsibility to provide a safe campus environment to UConn students and the greater University community. If the victim of a sexual assault is a minor, prompt reporting to DCF will be required by law and the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy for those who are mandated reporters under the law. In addition, prompt reporting to the University will be required pursuant to the Sexual Assault Response Policy. Any report of an alleged crime of a sexual nature received by the University pursuant to either of these policies is reported to the

police in accordance with federal law. The University has already begun training employees on both policies.

The University of Connecticut is, of course, an institution of higher education. As such, the vast majority of our students are eighteen and over. The University recognizes, however, that its responsibilities may extend to individuals under the age of eighteen, whether those individuals are enrolled as students, are involved in 4-H programs, come to campus as part of the University's K-12 outreach efforts, or participate in the Child Development Labs program. The University believes its existing policies and practices afford appropriate protections to the younger members of the University community.

The University does, in addition, permit the use of its facilities and grounds by privately owned businesses for the purpose of running camps and other programs which are attended primarily or exclusively by individuals under the age of eighteen. Although private companies and their employees are not governed by University policies, the University can impose contractual obligations in its Facility Use Agreements. For that reason, in those cases in which a private business seeks to use University facilities for a summer camp or other program geared toward minors, the University requires, as a condition of the use of its facilities, that the private owner contractually obligate itself to verify that all employees, prior to commencement of the camp or other program, are fully apprised of and trained on their reporting obligations pursuant to 17a-101 through 17a-103a of the Connecticut General Statutes.

The University is confident that its current practices and policies, reinforced by the recent adoption of the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy and the Sexual Assault Response Policy, afford the best possible protections to all members of the University community.