

Testimony of the Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County
In Support of HB 5031, An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses
Susan Schnitzer, Director of Grants and Program Administration

Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, March 6, 2012

Senator Bye, Representative Willis, and honorable members of the Committee, my name is Susan Schnitzer and I am the Director of Grants and Program Administration at the Center for Women and Families of Eastern Fairfield County (CWFEFC). CWFEFC is one of five dual agencies throughout the state of Connecticut that provides Domestic and Sexual Violence Victim Services and Prevention Education to residents of Eastern Fairfield County. These towns include Bridgeport, Easton, Fairfield, Monroe, Stratford and Trumbull. During the last fiscal year, over 4,600 adults, and children received crisis, advocacy, justice and specialized counseling and case management. Kathie's Place, our safe home for battered women, and their children shelter nearly 120 women, teens and children. Our Community educators teach over 6,500 school aged children and youth, adults and professionals about violence prevention, about understanding domestic and sexual violence and protecting children, and about best practices for working with victims and keeping children safe, respectively. During that same time period, CWFEFC provided services to 240 victims of sexual violence and their loved ones. In addition to providing crisis counseling services, we also work closely with colleges and universities in our area on education and prevention, as well as ensuring that victims/survivors on their campuses are able to acquire the services they need after an assault, in a fair and respectful manner. Based on that work, we would like to offer our support for HB 5031, An Act Concerning Sexual Violence on College Campuses.

Our agency works with faculty and students at the University of Bridgeport, Fairfield University, and Sacred Heart University as, respectively, a campus grant partner, a community initiative partner, and a partner in an annual sexual assault awareness walk. Through these collaborations, we 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.

HB 5031 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 consistent policies ensure that student are afforded the same rights as the general public through their schools. These policies about reporting procedures will also benefit students by requiring universities to clearly define the relationship between campus security and local law enforcement and "break the silence" concerning sexual assault on college and university campuses.

Sexual violence is far too common on college campuses, as indicated in the statistics that I am enclosing with my testimony.

HB 5031 is an important step forward in providing the necessary prevention education, legal intervention and access to healing services for students related to sexual violence on campus. Thank you.

Susan Schnitzer

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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.