

Testimony of Ingrid Pasten
In Support of bill *HB 6641- An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Whose Ability to Communication Lack of Consent is Substantially Impaired*
March 25, 2013

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Ingrid Pasten, I am a permanent resident of Stamford CT and am the Bilingual/Bicultural Crisis Counselor and Advocate at *The Center for Sexual Assault Crisis Counseling and Education*. I am also an undergraduate student at *Sacred Heart University* where I am pursuing my Bachelor's Degree in Social Work.

As a sexual assault crisis counselor I have worked with two clients who were victims of sexual assault who were identified as having a mental disability. In both cases the perpetrators knew that the victims were identified as having mental disabilities. It is because of their disabilities that this population is often victimized – many perpetrators know that because of their disabilities victims may not be able to formally communicate the assault and many will have an even greater level of fear than those without a disability.

Sex offenders who perpetrate sexual violence against people with disabilities are often not held accountable nor are their crimes successfully prosecuted. The existing Connecticut law states that a victim of sexual assault has to be “physically helpless” to deny consent. This concept makes references only to an individual who is unconscious or physically incompetent to express consent to sexual contact, and leaves no consideration to any other victims who might be helpless to stop a perpetrator because of a physical or mental disability. Because of what we know about sexual violence, this law does not account for the reality that victims of sexual violence do not have the ability to control the way they respond – their response will be decided based on their brains decision as to what will be safest in that given moment (this is a normal response for *all* people who are in situations that are traumatic.) With this gap in our state law, many perpetrators are not successfully prosecuted and held accountable for their crimes. Studies tell us that perpetrators of sexual violence are likely to have more than one victim – leaving perpetrators in these cases the ability to sexually assault many victims.

For these reasons I stand firmly behind *HB 6641: An Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Whose Ability to Communication Lack of Consent is Substantially Impaired* because victims who are disabled have the right to live their lives free from all type of violence and abuse.

The *Act Concerning the Sexual Assault of Persons Whose Ability to Communication Lack of Consent* can improve the services by:

- Persons with disabilities being adequately protected from potential perpetrators.
- Removing language that is offensive to persons with mental disabilities.
- Creating a fair law in which perpetrators are more likely to be held accountable for their offenses.
- Providing loved ones the ability to report on behalf of victims because there are more cases that the law would find criminal.

I firmly believe this bill will be crucial to hold sex offenders accountable for the actions. It would be extremely beneficial for victims and their families to find support from the law on this matter.

Thank you for your time,

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