



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

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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
Laura Cordes, Executive Director  
Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee and Public Safety & Security  
Committee, Wednesday, November 13, 2013**

Good afternoon, Senator Bye, Senator Hartley, Representative Willis, Representative Dargan, and members of both the Higher Education & Employment Advancement and Public Safety & Security Committees. My name is Laura Cordes and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS).

CONNSACS is the coalition of Connecticut's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs that provide sexual assault crisis counseling and victim advocacy to men, women, and children of all ages. During our last fiscal year, certified sexual assault victim advocates throughout the state provided hospital and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information, and referrals to over 7,000 victims and survivors of sexual violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight findings from our *2012 Campus Report Card* and for taking a closer look at what is needed to ensure best practices for college campuses in addressing sexual violence.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge the UCONN students who have used their strength and courage to publicly share their stories today.

For over two decades, CONNSACS has convened the Connecticut College Consortium Against Sexual Assault, an incredibly dedicated network of representatives from both public and private, urban and suburban colleges and universities from across the state who gather with sexual assault victim advocates to exchange ideas and support each other in the work to improve the response to and prevention of sexual violence. Members of the College Consortium include, UCONN, the Connecticut State University system and nearly all of Connecticut's private colleges and universities.

Understanding the unique needs of campus sexual assault victims and the dynamics of sexual violence on college campuses, our collective focus has been to identify and promote best practice, and to ensure that no matter where a victim may disclose that they are met with a compassionate non-judgmental response, given access to services, and clear information on their reporting options.

The rates of sexual violence on college campuses are alarmingly high. We know the numbers are much higher than even those found in the Clery Reports. The U.S. Department of Justice estimates that nearly 25 percent of college women have been the victim of attempted or completed rape during their academic career.

Often absent from conversations about sexual violence is information about the individuals who perpetrate these crimes. Focusing on the offender reminds us of who is really responsible for these crimes and helps us to identify and challenge the many misconceptions we have about rapists and sexual assault.

Thanks to new studies and the work of Dr. David Lisak, who has profiled campus offenders as the “undetected rapists,” we now know more about the perpetrators of these crimes. Contrary to popular belief, perpetrators are rarely strangers, but more often someone known to the victim: a classmate, a friend's boyfriend, a roommate, or an intimate partner.

We also know that most sexual assaults are premeditated. Offenders target their victims and use their familiarity with victims to gain access, plan their assaults and then use alcohol, fear and/or threats, to coerce or force an assault. Young women are taught various tools to protect themselves against sexual assault-like holding your keys at night, walking in pairs, or to protect your drink. When a young woman or man is raped on campus, by someone they know and/or trust, they struggle to make sense of what happened. It simply does not fit squarely with the definition of rape they were taught and it runs counter to what they were taught to protect themselves against.

Student survivors of sexual violence are often living away from home for the first time, in a closed community, with a new and likely limited support network. Having grown up in a culture where victims are routinely blamed for their own assault, survivors of sexual violence weigh carefully if, when, and with whom to disclose.

In order to secure their safety and attempt to hold offenders accountable, survivors risk losing control of their private information, and open themselves up for judgment and intense scrutiny of their decisions both before and after the assault. Many survivors are experiencing the effects of trauma, are revictimized when they face an unsupportive friend, or are harassed by the offender and/or the offender's friends. Students who are sexually assaulted are more likely than their peers to miss class, perform poorly academically and withdraw from school altogether.

Additionally, survivors are faced with the daunting task of understanding and navigating their reporting options.

Understandably the response and information that the survivor receives from someone they perceive to be in a position of authority can have a positive or negative impact. A compassionate, supportive, and professional response can make *the* difference in how a victim heals, if they reach out for services, or if they move forward in the campus adjudication or criminal justice process.

The 2012 Campus Report Card, released in January of this year, provides a snapshot of the self-reported sexual violence policies and practices at 25 of Connecticut's colleges and universities. It was authored by CONNSACS in conjunction with the College Consortium and the Connecticut Campus Coalition to End Violence Against Women, a smaller group of the College Consortium organized by Southern Connecticut State University who worked together from 2009 -2012 as

successful recipients of a three year Department of Justice (DOJ) Grant to Address Violence Against Women on College Campuses.

Additionally the Campus Report Card highlights the progress that has been made throughout the state to address sexual violence on campuses, and identifies the gaps in response and areas for improvement based on promising and nationally recognized best practices.

The survey was conducted in the summer of 2012 and includes responses from four two-year and twenty one four-year institutions which represents the largest participation rate of the three reports released since 1999.

Questions were asked about the existence and content of: *Campus Policies & Procedures, First Year or Incoming Student Education, Awareness and Prevention Activities, Residential Life, Greek Life, Campus Safety, Campus Response Teams, Victim and Survivor Services, and the Campus Judicial Process.*

The report details individual institutions' responses and provides "grades" in aggregate for the four year institutions. The full report has been provided to members of both committees and can be found on the main page of our website: [connsacs.org](http://connsacs.org).

On the positive side-- the report shows that Connecticut Colleges and Universities have taken considerable steps to institutionalize policies and practices that promote access to on campus support and off campus community based services, and allow for supports during the adjudication process. Collectively, Connecticut schools received higher grades for having written policies that define sexual assault, consent, and possible sanctions for student offenders-- all now required in PA 12-78 and the federal SaVE Act.

Also on the positive side, we found that more students are being educated about sexual assault on campuses. The majority of colleges and universities reported requiring that first year students receive sexual assault education as part of an orientation program.

We also found an increase in the number of schools that have formed multidisciplinary campus response teams, a nationally recognized best practice. These teams include representatives from key departments who are likely to be first responders. This includes staff from health and wellness centers, women centers, campus security, student life, residential life staff and local sexual assault crisis programs. These teams meet regularly to discuss protocols, cases, and trends in perpetration, and use what they learn to improve policies and the campus response, and suggest opportunities for education and training.

Although we have seen a marked change since our first report, there is still much to be done. Ongoing review and improvement of our campus policies and response is essential as are our efforts to prevent sexual assault in the first place. Sexual violence is not inevitable. Prevention education and training can help Connecticut colleges and universities reduce the rates of sexual violence while improving the response to students who disclose an assault.

The 2012 Campus Report Card assessed for the first time, the provision of both prevention education programs in addition to the traditional awareness programs that focus on ways that women can ward off a possible assault as mentioned before, watching your drink, or utilizing the buddy system. Awareness programs are frequently mislabeled as “prevention” programs and while possibly helpful at reducing some level of risk, when offered alone, these programs often reinforce victim blaming rather than focusing on who commits sexual violence and the behaviors they use to assault their victim.

Prevention strategies focus on stopping the perpetration of sexual violence before it occurs by encouraging community members to examine the attitudes and cultural norms that minimize victims experience and excuse violent and oppressive behaviors.

A promising prevention practice is to promote programs which build the skills of both men and women to be active bystanders. These programs give individuals the tools to respond supportively when they encounter individuals engaged in sexually abusive, demeaning or discriminatory behavior.

According to our report, bystander intervention programs are now being utilized on several campuses, a promising trend that we hope continues to grow.

The lowest grades were given for a lack of a mandatory training for fraternities and sororities, even though research has shown that fraternities, sororities, and athletic clubs have higher incidences of sexual violence and thus should be given priority. Low grades were also given for a lack of mandatory training for campus police, judicial board hearing officers and campus response team members--the very people we know serve as first responders.

It should be noted again that at the time we surveyed campuses, PA 12-78 had just gone into effect. When we asked campuses what their largest area of need was in order to address and prevent sexual violence on campus, more than 75% of respondents said assistance with prevention education and training.

Ongoing training is clearly a noticeable area for improvement, and one that requires additional resources and assessment.

Campuses that provide ongoing, mandatory training and educational programming that focuses on both awareness and prevention of sexual violence are more likely to create a campus community where students are clear about the sanctions for violating the sexual assault misconduct policy, feel safe in seeking services and reporting, and are engaged as active bystanders in challenging the behaviors that foster violence and oppression of any student.

In addition to the grades and individual campus responses, the Campus Report Card contains a description of policies and procedures that have been promoted and utilized in the field of sexual violence service provision and prevention on college campuses.

They include:

- Frequent review of sexual assault policies to address identified barriers to accessing services, reporting, or the adjudication process;
- Active Campus Response Team or Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). Teams should meet regularly to review protocols, implement training and awareness programming, and address barriers to survivors accessing services. Mandatory training should be required of all team members and teams should include local community based sexual assault crisis services;
- Mandatory training for Campus security officers. Training should include information about perpetrators of sexual violence, common responses to experiencing trauma, the role of first responders, institutional policies, procedures, and options for reporting sexual assault;
- Clear access to both formal and anonymous reporting options and procedures. Information about reporting options should be widely available and easily understood throughout the campus community to ensure that survivors are able to report their assaults in the way that is most comfortable for them;
- Partnerships with local community-based sexual assault crisis programs to provide survivors with access to free, off campus confidential crisis counseling and advocacy.

Policies and programs are only as strong as the individuals who are trained to drive and administer them. Institutions of higher education must build the capacity and skills of staff to ensure that victims' experiences and needs are not minimized and that offenders are held accountable.

As you consider possible changes to existing law, we would like to suggest two improvements to PA 12-78:

- develop a mechanism by which colleges and universities can demonstrate compliance with the requirements of the state law;
- expand the mandated training requirement to include campus security officers and members of campus response teams.

The information that has been presented today and the complaints filed in recent weeks underscore the very real need for all colleges and universities to re-examine and redouble their efforts to build communities where there is zero-tolerance for sexual violence and where the problem is understood and addressed by administrators, students, staff and faculty.

Thank you again for the opportunity to come before you today. Please feel free to contact me if you would like additional information.

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