



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Public Hearing

Testimony

By

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Co-Chairs, Ranking Members, and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you again on this important topic and to express UConn's support for House Bill 5029. My name is Elizabeth Conklin, and I serve as the University's Title IX Coordinator and Associate Vice President of the Office of Diversity and Equity.

The University of Connecticut fully appreciates and shares the commitment shown by the Connecticut legislature to address the critical issue of sexual violence on college campuses in the state of Connecticut. As we have seen, this commitment is also reflected at the national level as demonstrated by President Obama through the establishment of a White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. Sexual assault needs to be confronted directly as we collectively work to prevent this crime from taking place and to provide victims with the resources they need.

We also support the legislature's efforts to mandate clear and uniform procedures, response protocols and training. As we shared with the legislature through our testimony last November, many of the measures proposed in this bill are in line with established practices at UConn. Others we continue to develop. We are working actively on the following areas:

- Crafting victim-survivor resource documents to ensure they are as clear, concise, and informative as possible;
- Expanding existing training related to sexual assault and harassment and aiding victims; and

- Initiating training specifically targeted at intimate partner violence primary prevention and awareness training.

In November we outlined for the legislature the vast array of resources and training UConn already provides. Rather than repeat that, we thought today would best be spent informing you of the steps UConn taken since we were here last.

Specifically, in November we told you about the President's Task Force on Civility and Campus Culture. Last May, President Herbst formed the Task Force, a diverse group comprised of students, faculty and staff. The President charged this group with making “specific recommendations that are both effective and practical, which the University may implement to enhance and support a culture of civility and respect on its campuses.” The Task Force was expressly asked to “examine and recommend new or expanded programming and avenues of educating and communicating with students” on the full range of issues associated with civility and culture, including, “...ways to deter and address sexual violence of any kind, harassment, intimidation, bullying and incivility,” among others.

After an intensive semester-long review, study, discussion and open-forum process, the Task Force presented its report to President Herbst on December 15, 2013. The recommendations of the Task Force were reviewed by a group of senior level administrators, led by Vice President of Student Affairs Michael Gilbert, and including both Chief of Police Barbara O'Connor and myself. We were instructed by the President to identify those recommendations that should be accepted and implemented immediately. As a result, the President has instructed that a number of recommendations be implemented without delay, including but not limited to:

- The formation of a single support office which would, among other duties, provide direct assistance to students who are victims of crimes. This office's staff would help students navigate their way through various processes and toward the resources and options that are available to them as victims;
- Implementing an enhanced program of bystander training for all students (the planning for bystander training is already underway);
- Offering student-oriented education programming on healthy relationships;
- Expanding and enhancing student-orientated educational programming on sexual violence prevention;
- Expanding educational programming on alcohol and drug abuse; and
- Taking the mandatory education on sexual violence prevention which we already do for Freshmen and extending it to different points during the student experience.

I have available with me today copies of the full Task Force Report, the memorandum to the President from the group led by Vice President Gilbert, and President Herbst's message apprising the University community of the implementation of those recommendations, including anticipated timelines and responsible offices. All of this information is also available on the University's website at: www.president.uconn.edu.

We believe that implementation of these recommendations, along with the robust policies and procedures already in place at UConn, demonstrate the University's commitment to working aggressively to eliminate all forms of sexual violence from our University. In addition, when incidents do occur, we strive to make resources and services for victims as easy to navigate as possible, and we will continue this important ongoing effort.

In conclusion, we appreciate the opportunity to testify today on this complex, important and difficult issue. We share the goals of supporting victim-survivors and working towards the eradication of sexual violence on college campuses. We welcome the chance to participate in this important conversation taking place here in Connecticut and nationally. We look forward to partnering with the legislature and other institutions of higher education throughout Connecticut to confront these critical issues and work collaboratively to combat sexual violence on all college campuses.