

Testimony of Jessica DeFelice
SB 636, An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent
February 26, 2015

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and members of the Committee of Higher Education and Employment Advancement, thank you for this opportunity to testify in front of you today. My name is Jessica DeFelice and I am a student at Eastern Connecticut State University. I am president of Eastern Connecticut State University College Democrats and an Honors Student and, frankly, I am tremendously pleased to support SB 636, An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent.

SB 636 would require all Connecticut colleges and universities to include affirmative consent in their sexual assault, stalking, and intimate partner violence policies. Affirmative consent is the conscious and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity, and should be a key element in determining whether sexual activity was consensual.

During my time at Eastern, I, along with my peers, have taken great strides in recognizing how to become responsible students, thoughtful friends, and exemplary leaders. From involvement in campus clubs and activities to compassionate faculty and staff that always are available to listen, I owe a lot of credit to Eastern for my growing up. However, my friends have taught me probably as much as my professors have over the past few years.

I have learned that a woman's provocative clothing does not mean it is an invitation to assault her. I have learned that you will get a label if you act a certain way, regardless of your intention. I have learned that while a woman can say no at any time of the interaction, it might not always be the safest decision to make. I have also learned that sometimes not even a no is good enough for college administrations to pursue sexual assault allegation when the victim was dressed provocatively, or drinking, or dancing that night of the attack.

This is why this legislation is so important. Instead of questioning the victim if they said no loud enough, clear enough, or enough times, let's question the offender if they had asked for permission. Instead of admonishing the victim for not behaving the "right way" to make this case easier or more straightforward so they could be labeled a "good victim", let's recognize that there is no emblematic sexual assault case. Let's remember that sexual assault can happen to anyone, at any time, unless we change the conversation from no means no to only yes means yes.

Thank you again for your consideration of SB 636.