

**Testimony of Johanna M. DeBari**

**Proposed S.B. No. 636, "An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent"**

**February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015**

Good evening Chair(s) Flexer and Haddad. Thank you for your interest in sexual violence prevention on college campuses with the proposal of this bill. I support the intent behind Proposed Bill No. 636 "An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent."

If passed, all Connecticut higher education institutions will have to abide by an "affirmative consent" definition which will have a multitude of positive affects for combatting sexual violence on college campuses. First, affirmative consent provides a more focused means for defining consent. Thus, there is more clarity in how a college or university can engage its students in a broader conversation about healthy sexuality and safe sexual behaviors.

Second, establishing an affirmative consent policy helps to shift the focus of any future investigation more towards the perpetrator's behavior, rather than immediately questioning what the victim did or did not do. This will signify the beginning of a much needed cultural shift in the ways we as a state view sexual assault.

Third, an affirmative consent policy will shift common perceptions of advocacy from "no means no", to "yes means yes." This is an important change to emphasize, because focusing on the need to gain a firm, clear, "yes" from one's partner(s) protects victims of sexual assault who cannot or do not say "no." This is particularly poignant in situations where an individual is incapacitated by drugs or alcohol, where physical ability impede one's ability to say "no."

Fourth, as affirmative consent policies positively alters a system that places the burden of proof almost entirely on the victim to prove how effectively they resisted the assault, to focusing disciplinary efforts towards condemning the perpetrator's action for not receiving a clear, affirmative "yes." This bill begins to directly address the culture of "victim blaming" related to sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

Finally, this bill will encourage conversations. Not only within formal institution-run programs, but within and between students engaging in sexual activity. Since affirmative consent requires voluntary, clear, and conscious affirmative agreement to engage in sexual activity, this yields the need for individuals to have conversations with their partners about sex and how to have a healthy sexual relationship. Setting the standard for encouraging these conversations is an important step towards preventing sexual violence on college campuses.

In conclusion, I support the intent of this bill and believe it will be an important progression towards making college campuses a safer place for students by combatting sexual violence and intimate partner violence.

Thank you for your time and consideration.