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**Testimony of Nicole Seymour, CONNSACS intern and YWCA volunteer
In Support of SB636 AN ACT CONCERNING AFFIRMATIVE CONSENT
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To Co-Chairs Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and esteemed members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Nicole Seymour and I am an MSW student at the University of Connecticut and an intern at the state's leading voice to end sexual violence, Connecticut Sexual Assault and Crisis Services. I also work directly with victims in crisis as a volunteer sexual assault crisis counselor. This Committee has championed preventing campus sexual violence and providing more supports for victims and survivors. This Act, SB636 An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent, is a standard for the adjudication of cases involving sexual misconduct on college campuses.

Higher education institutions adopting affirmative consent standards will help clarify internal university investigations of sexual-assault accusations. Presently the "no means no" is utilized in most Connecticut campuses, which puts the blame on the victim in a sexual assault case. Victims are responsible for demonstrating the ways they protested the sexual assault, such as fighting or screaming.

Instead, affirmative consent will ultimately focus on the accused assailant's behavior rather than the victim's. Victim blaming, present in every facet of our culture, unfortunately lengthens and complicates the healing process for victims. Currently it is uneven burden of proof and ultimately has resulted in uneven justice for victims.

Affirmative consent will create a standard in which both parties must give affirmative, conscious, and voluntary agreement to each phase of the sexual encounter. No resistance or no silence should never be considered consent. Such forms of assumed consent should not be tolerated and should not exist as the norm. How the yes is received needs to be given without fear of retaliation and given freely. Yes means yes—at every phase of sexual contact, not just the first phase—ensures that both parties are safe. It cannot be assumed because one individual was drinking, was wearing a certain outfit, or was at a certain location.

As a counselor, victim blaming is ever present among victims and survivors. The culture of questioning what victims could have done differently to prevent the sexual assault does not lead to healthy healing. Victims are tormented with these facts and experience significant barriers to seeking treatment and reporting to police. The fear of being judged for what they did or didn't do must be changed. No other serious crime carries this amount of victim blaming. Standards that are more progressive and victim-centered must be added.

Affirmative consent is one important tool in creating safer college campuses. It will continue the conversation on campuses regarding healthy sexuality and relationships. Much more needs to happen before students enter college, most notably comprehensive sexual education. However, the prevalence of one in five women experiencing sexual assault on college campuses must be addressed immediately. The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee must enact SB636 to provide victims with more supports and address the engrained rape culture. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions or comments.