

Testimony of Nicole Simonsen
SB636 An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent
February 26, 2015

Good day Chairs Bartolomeo and Willis, and esteemed members of the Committee for Higher Education and Employment Advancement. My name is Nicole Simonsen and I am currently a junior at the University of Connecticut studying Women's Gender and Sexuality Studies as well as Public Policy. I would like to extend my sincerest appreciation for your concern regarding sexual violence prevention on college campuses. I support the intent behind SB636 An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent because it is one of many essential institutional changes that are needed to dismantle a campus environment that perpetuates the victimization of sexual assault survivors.

The epidemic of rape and sexual assault on college campuses is the antithesis of an educational climate that fosters a positive learning environment for all students. For the last two years, I have been a peer educator for UConn's Violence Against Women Prevention Program. The primary workshop we facilitate focuses on understanding consent and disseminating UConn's definition of affirmative consent.

In my experience as a facilitator for the Violence Against Women Prevention Program, I have witnessed programs and policies that have succeeded and those that have failed, with affirmative consent being one that has proven successful. We attempt to teach students about the signs of affirmative physical and verbal consent instead of upholding a no means no policy. By shifting the discourse of consent from resistance to affirmation, the responsibility lies on the initiator to ensure they have obtained consent.

The University of Connecticut is not impervious to sexual assault and the multiplicity of complications it produces. Despite having an affirmative consent policy, the University response needs to be multi-faceted. Adopting an affirmative consent standard in higher education would legitimize consent, and reinforce community expectations for healthy sexual conduct. It is necessary for all institutions to uphold and instate policies that demand affirmative consent.

University stakeholders must recognize the role they play in our rape culture, and with this recognition comes both accountability and the responsibility to evoke positive change. Affirmative consent not only augments prevention efforts, but also improves clarity in adjudication processes. It is imperative that our society takes proactive measures to eliminate sexual violence in all forms. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions or comments.