

Testimony of Sarah Noel Yenkelun
SB636 An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
2/26/2015

Good day Chairs Bartolomeo and Willis, and esteemed members of the committee for Higher Education and Employment Advancement. My name is Sarah Yenkelun and I am currently a senior at the University of Connecticut studying Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies as well as Journalism. I am also a certified Sexual Assault Crisis Advocate through the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut. Thank you for your interest in potentially adopting a unified affirmative consent policy throughout higher education in Connecticut. I support the intent behind affirmative consent.

I believe a unified education, understanding and awareness of affirmative consent is directly paralleled to conversations about healthy sexuality and safe sexual behaviors. Affirmative consent encourages sexual partners to talk about sex by making consent the cornerstone of a healthy sexual encounter.

As a Sexual Assault Crisis Advocate, it is paramount to analyze the beneficial ways affirmative consent can support sexual assault victims. Victim-blaming is consistently perpetuated at the University of Connecticut, as well as many other institutions of higher learning across the state and the country. By establishing a universal affirmative consent policy, the focus of sexual assault investigations becomes the perpetrator's behavior instead of what the victim did or didn't do to prevent an assault.

During my training at the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut my colleagues and I would often reflect on the terminology and actual laws surrounding consent, specifically in areas of high rates of sexual assault, such as college campuses. Not only would a universal affirmative consent policy create boundaries for victims of assault to feel comfortable reporting their abuse, it would also create a space for educational components of consent and healthy sexual behavior to be discussed between students, staff and faculty. By insisting on a universal affirmative consent policy, we will create a consistent standard to increase clarity and support for survivors of sexual assault. Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions or comments.