

-YALE COLLEGE- DEMOCRATS

February 26, 2015

Testimony of Tyler Blackmon
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In favor: S.B. No. 636
An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent

There are currently only two college campuses in all of Connecticut with a policy of affirmative consent with regard to sexual assault. One is UConn, the other is Yale. I'm here today to tell you, from the perspective of a college student at Yale, that affirmative consent policy has been truly transformational for my college experience and that it is entirely unjust that such an experience is limited to only two campuses in this state.

More specifically, I want to use my time today to address some myths surrounding affirmative consent. These are myths propagated by opponents who have either not taken the time to do their research or are willingly misleading the public for ulterior motives. None of them have actually studied at one of these colleges during a time when affirmative consent policy existed.

Myth of Miscommunication – This myth says that sometimes signals are too complicated to understand in a sexual setting. But any Yale or UConn student knows how absurd that claim truly is. In fact, it is the subject of a series of workshops we go through at school to learn to recognize the subtle signals people give at every stage of an interaction to show they affirmatively consent to sexual activity. We all learn as infants that people have boundaries, that you shouldn't breach. And you ask for consent non-verbally all the time. So here's the bottom line: sexual assault *does not* happen because of confusion or miscommunication. It occurs because one person doesn't ask for consent and proceeds to violate another person anyway.

Myth of the "Women's Issue" – The second myth (and probably the most infuriating from my perspective) is that this is a women's issue, which is not only insulting to women and men alike but also ignores the thousands of men who are sexually violated in this country every year. Though tracking unreported sexual assaults is always tricky, a recent study from the National Crime Victimization Survey has estimated that as much as 38 percent of incidents of rape and sexual violence were against men. So it's important to keep in mind that when we are talking about sexual assault, we are talking about people of all genders and all orientations.

Myth of Presumed Guilt – Mirror mirror on the wall, this myth is the falsest of them all. It's a myth which is usually told by people who probably didn't go to law school in order to understand the difference between two very different debates: one on affirmative consent and the other on due process. The debate about preponderance of evidence or beyond a

reasonable doubt is an entirely separate issue that those who are uninformed about the actual policy mistakenly conflate with affirmative consent. We are not asking to alter the due process surrounding sexual assault, we are asking you to change the question. The question is no longer “Did you receive a no?” The question is now, “Did you receive a yes?” Changing that question has led to a fundamental change on my campus that has made dorm life more safe and has allowed students to focus on their studies rather than having to worry about being sexually assaulted.

Those are the myths. But here are some statistics that are not. According to the World Health Organization, victims of sexual assault are:

- **3 times** more likely to suffer from depression.
- **6 times** more likely to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.
- **13 times** more likely to abuse alcohol.
- **26 times** more likely to abuse drugs.
- **4 times** more likely to contemplate suicide.

Connecticut truly has the power to do what so many thought was impossible: it can change the culture of college campuses. I’ve seen firsthand how it has transformed my campus, but I think it is wrong that only students at Yale and at UConn have that security. I desperately hope you have the wherewithal to deliver that same experience to every student in the state of Connecticut.