



Tuesday, March 1st, 2016

Testimony of **Alexander Borsa**,
Communication and Consent Educator,
Student Researcher, Yale University

505 N. College Street, Suite P11
New Haven, CT 06511

In favor: H.B. 5376
An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent

I am here today in support of mandating affirmative consent policy and education in institutions of higher learning within Connecticut, and to share with you relevant research and professional experience that demonstrates why it is your duty as lawmakers to pass such a bill.

I am a senior at Yale conducting independent research in the field of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and have been employed by the Yale College Dean's Office for two years as a Communication and Consent Educator. I have also been an LGBTQ community leader and activist since my freshman year. As such, I have extensive personal, intellectual, and professional experience into how sexual dynamics shape and influence our communities, especially on college campuses.

The Communication and Consent Education, or "CCE" program at Yale is the first of its kind, and is setting the gold standard nationwide on effective and empowering means of preventing sexual violence and improving sexual climate. One of the primary cornerstones of the program is an understanding that acceptable sexual behavior requires the freely given consent of all parties involved. As a CCE, my colleagues and I educate incoming freshmen about affirmative consent, as well as the myths around consent that are perpetuated by misinformed – but often well-meaning – individuals nationwide. Since the implementation of the program five years ago, it has now become understood campus-wide what healthy, respectful, and safe sexual expression looks like, resulting in educated students who are equipped to make more empowering choices about their intimate lives. This includes being able to better recognize warning signs in partners earlier down the line, preventing sexual violence before it has a chance to happen.

There are public voices who would lead you to believe that affirmative

consent, in fact, will result in miscommunication, confusion, false accusations, and a general decrease in the ability of college students – and others – to feel comfortable having sex. I am here to tell you that this is untrue, and in fact, quite the opposite of what affirmative consent education establishes.

One of the primary myths surrounding affirmative consent is the “myth of miscommunication,” which claims that a partner engaging in sex may not be able to read signals correctly – especially with a “confusing” standard of affirmative consent – resulting in sexual violence. I am here to tell you that this is in fact *not* how sexual violence occurs, which is corroborated by experts in the field. Social psychologists, and others, have proven that we each possess the requisite skills to determine whether consent is given by the time we are toddlers – in fact, we’re experts at it now, and do it everyday. We are able to tell if somebody is accepting or comfortable with what we are doing, if they aren’t, or if we don’t have enough information to know for certain. Affirmative consent ensures that students wait until they receive positive signals before engaging in sex – a practice they already possess the skills for! Sexual violence doesn’t happen because people mistake signals or miscommunicate – it happens when individuals perceive signals and make the conscious choice to disregard them, and to transgress boundaries.

Furthermore, the myth that a standard of affirmative consent will result in false accusations is grossly false, logically unsound, and empirically misguided. As research shows, accusations of sexual assault are hardly ever falsely made. In actuality, victims of sexual violence are dramatically *more* likely to rationalize their experiences in a way that convinces them they *didn’t* experience assault, as a psychological defense mechanism.

Establishing a standard of affirmative consent means setting a safe, comfortable standard for sexual conduct on our college campuses. It means that students only engage in sex when they know it is mutually desired, with the knowledge that they possess the skills to distinguish between “consent” and “no consent,” and to clarify with their partners if they are unsure. As our theories and understanding of healthy sexuality continue to evolve and improve, it is important that we implement our new knowledge accordingly. Mandating affirmative consent education is an incredibly important part of this, and will result in healthier, safer, and more empowered college campuses statewide.

Thank you.