



**UCONN COLLEGE DEMOCRATS**

**Storrs, Connecticut**

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In favor: House Bill No. 5376, An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent

Honorable Chairs Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, and the members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, the University of Connecticut College Democrats are writing in favor of House Bill Number 5376, An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent. We would like to thank the town of Mansfield's State Senator Mae Flexer and Representative Gregg Haddad for their work on this piece of legislation that is so important to us as UConn students.

House Bill Number 5376 would create a uniform directive for all Connecticut institutions of higher education to include affirmative consent in their sexual assault policies. Affirmative consent is the clear, active, and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity that may be rescinded at any time. Here at the University of Connecticut, we have seen firsthand the effects of affirmative consent policies. Through UConn's approach to ending sexual assault on campus, we have attended Violence Against Women Prevention Program workshops and had meaningful discussions about what consent actually is. We have learned that clothing or a prior relationship status, among other factors, does not automatically guarantee consent. Consent is only guaranteed by an affirmative, clear, "yes".

Affirmative consent policies set the standard for positive conversations about healthy sexual relationships. By having affirmative consent policies that jumpstart these conversations, we create a precedent for preventing sexual violence on our college campuses. With clear and consistent affirmative consent policies at every Connecticut college and university, we are taking the right steps in changing not only our institutions' cultures but our communities' and state's as well. As we age, we bring our ideas about healthy sex and relationships into the world.

In his speech at the most recent Academy Awards, Vice President Joe Biden urged the nation to rethink consent declaring, "*We must and can change the culture so no abused woman or man will ask themselves, 'What did I do?' They did nothing wrong.*" With his comments in mind, we firmly believe that affirmative consent standards help us to reframe our preconceived ideas about sexual assault. Too often do we resort to blaming the survivor rather than the perpetrator. With affirmative consent policies, we ask the perpetrator "how did you obtain consent?" rather than asking the victim "what did you do to prevent this?" It is important that the state of Connecticut, along with its higher education institutions, take strong steps to fight a culture of victim blaming.

We thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. We hope that the Committee will take the right steps in supporting survivors, encouraging conversations about healthy relationships, and holding perpetrators accountable by voting favorably on House Bill 5376.