

The Center for
Family Justice
(Bridgeport)
203-333-2233 hotline
203-334-6154 office

Women's Center
of Greater Danbury
203-731-5204 hotline
203-731-5200 office

Women & Families Center
(Meriden)
203-235-9297 office
(Middletown)
203-344-1474 office
(New Haven)
203-235-444 hotline
203-389-5010 office

Rape Crisis Center
of Milford
203-878-1212 hotline
203-874-8712 office

YWCA New Britain
Sexual Assault Crisis Service
(New Britain)
860-223-1787 hotline
860-225-4681 office
(Hartford)
860-547-1022 hotline
860-225-4681 office

The Center for Sexual Assault
Crisis Counseling and Education
(Stamford)
203-329-2929 hotline
203-348-9346 office

Susan B. Anthony Project
(Torrington)
860-482-7133 hotline
860-489-3798 office

Safe Haven of
Greater Waterbury
203-753-3613 hotline
203-753-3613 office

Sexual Assault Crisis Center
of Eastern Connecticut
(Willimantic)
860-456-2789 hotline
860-456-3595 office
(New London)
860-437-7766 hotline
860-442-0604 office

96 Pitkin Street
East Hartford, CT 06108
860-282-9881
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CONNECTICUT ALLIANCE TO END SEXUAL VIOLENCE



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Testimony of Deb Heinrich, Director of Policy and Public Relations Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS) Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee In support of HB 5376, An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent March 1, 2016

Good Afternoon Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis, Senator Witkos, Representative Betts and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Deb Heinrich and I am the Director of Policy and Public Relations for Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence (formerly CONNSACS). The Alliance is the state's leading voice to end sexual violence and the coalition of our state's nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs, which provide free and confidential sexual assault crisis counseling and victim advocacy to thousands of women, men and children each year.

Certified sexual assault victim advocates provide hospital, police and court accompaniment, support groups, individual counseling, 24/7 hotline support, information and referrals to victims and survivors of sexual violence throughout the state, and prevention education and training programs to thousands of Connecticut residents each year. The Alliance also coordinates the Connecticut College Consortium Against Sexual Violence, a unique and dedicated network of representatives from both private and public colleges and universities who meet throughout the academic school year to exchange ideas and support each other in the work to improve responses to and prevention of sexual violence.

Thank you for your continued commitment to addressing campus sexual violence, your support and interest in the well-being of survivors and the opportunity to speak today in support of raised HB 5376 An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent.

The rates of on campus victimization are well known. The White House Council on Women and Girls', Rape and Sexual Assault: A Renewed Call to Action report notes that 1 in 5 women have been sexually assaulted while in college.

We have taken significant steps forward in our state to address sexual violence. Colleges and universities are listening more closely to students and survivors and deepening partnerships with our member community based sexual assault crisis service programs while working hard to implement both new federal and state policies.

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A best practice and indeed a factor that we looked at in our last Campus Report Card , was whether or not each institution defined consent in their sexual assault policy. That was four years ago. Today, not only do campuses have consent policies in place, but according to a January 2016 OLR report, the vast majority of the institutions of higher institution in Connecticut have adopted affirmative consent policies. Therefore, this legislation is essentially codifying existing practice for the majority of colleges and universities in our state and ensuring that this policy is consistent no in all institutions.

It is our belief that an affirmative consent policy is an important tool that can help campus communities clarify consent as something given freely without coercion or manipulation. It will promote dialogue about healthy sexuality, and create a more equitable outcome in the campus disciplinary process.

Affirmative consent is a shift from “no means no” to “yes means yes”. While “no means no” places the burden on the victim to actively resist, “yes means yes” engages both partners in a dialogue about what they want and about actively seeking consent.

Unfortunately the "no means no" standard and the idea that the absence of no equals consent, continues to de-legitimizes victims and the cases in which victims could not, or did not, say “no”, or actively resist. When a standard requires that affirmative actions are necessary for consent, victims who did not say “no”, but who also did not say “yes”, are protected, and moreover those investigating and adjudicating these cases will begin to look equally at the respondents actions how did she say yes? what steps did you take to determine consent? how did she give consent? in addition to the questions already determined by the institution’s procedures.

There exists in our society, a prevailing narrative that continues to place the burden on the victim to demonstrate how they fought hard enough, screamed loud enough, or protested assertively enough. This narrative reinforces the idea that a victim is responsible for their assault, which is perpetuated by a system that holds them responsible for actively resisting without holding the respondent responsible for obtaining active consent. This narrative of blame and shame lengthens and complicates the healing process for victims, keeps them from coming forward to seek services and report, and negatively feeds into a culture that minimizes sexual violence. However, with the addition of affirmative consent policies supplemented by strong educational programming, we can begin to shift this narrative and move towards a culture of sexual respect.

This is a unique moment in time for our state and nation in that there is a deeper understanding of how cultural attitudes shape our beliefs about sexual violence. There are more efforts to address those cultural attitudes, to minimize blaming victims, galvanize bystanders to act and to hold offenders accountable. Codifying the best practice of affirmative consent which is already used in the majority of institutions of higher education will create consistency throughout our state, improve the process in which information is gathered in a student misconduct investigation, and encourage much needed conversation about consent and healthy relationships.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

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