



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

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Testimony

Submitted By

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H.B. 5376, An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent

Please accept this written testimony in support of Raised House Bill 5376, An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent. I am the Associate Vice President of the Office of Diversity and Equity and Title IX Coordinator at the University of Connecticut.

As UConn's Title IX Coordinator, I am responsible for coordinating the University's response to reports of sex-based discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. In this role, I work collaboratively with on and off-campus partners on sexual harassment and sexual violence prevention and education efforts to ensure UConn's commitment to creating and maintaining a campus environment free from all forms of sexual violence, harassment, exploitation, and intimidation. In particular, we work to ensure that students who report having experienced experience sexual assault receive a holistic range of services and support, including the ability to participate in university and law enforcement investigations.

The University of Connecticut fully appreciates and shares the commitment shown by the Connecticut legislature to address the critical issue of sexual violence on campuses in the state of Connecticut. UConn has long taken sexual violence on our campuses extremely seriously. In particular, under President Susan Herbst's leadership, UConn has taken significant steps toward the goals of eliminating sexual violence on all of its campuses, providing appropriate support for victims of sexual violence, implementing enhanced training for faculty, staff and students and hiring additional staff in this key area. Given this commitment, we are pleased to support the leadership of our state legislature; leadership that is remarkable because of its care, concern, and commitment to reducing incidents of sexual assault on college and university campuses.

The University of Connecticut has maintained the affirmative consent standard for student disciplinary cases since 2002, and supports this important legislation. UConn has found that this affirmative standard allows for a meaningful dialogue about consent that is first introduced to students during orientation and reaffirmed throughout a student's tenure at the University. Sexual consent must be, as our code articulates, "informed, freely, and actively given."

The affirmative consent standard reflected in UConn's Policy and in the language of Raised Bill 5376 ensures that communication regarding sexual activity be active and ongoing and requires communication and affirmation between both partners. This allows for critical and clear communication between partners and recognizes that force, coercion, and excessive use of substances like alcohol and other drugs all serve to silence that critical communication.

A recent DOJ study of college age females who were victims of sexual assault between 1995-2013 clearly indicated that the offender is not a stranger but, in 80% of cases, was known to the victim and, for 50% of the women, the offenders were more likely to be friends or acquaintances than intimate partners. This presents a reality for the occurrence of sexual violence that requires universities and colleges, as we have done at UConn, to develop standards in their student code that expect students to communicate clearly and to affirm their desires and limitations. It insists that definitions of consent be built upon principles of mutual respect and the equality of participants.

It is our expectation at UConn that silence, incapacitation and powerlessness do not and should not mean consent. It is our responsibility as an institution of higher education to educate, adjudicate, and hold students accountable to a standard of affirmative consent.

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony. And thank you to this committee for your leadership and willingness to set a standard of affirmative consent for institutions of higher education in Connecticut to maintain for their students.