

Testimony of Gretchen Raffa, MSW**Director, Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England, Inc.****In support of proposed *House Bill 5376 An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent***

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and honorable members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, my name is Gretchen Raffa, Director of Public Policy, Advocacy & Strategic Engagement at Planned Parenthood of Southern New England testifying in support of proposed House Bill 5376 *An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent*. Planned Parenthood of Southern New England serves over 64,000 patients yearly for reproductive and sexual health services in 17 health centers across the state. As a health care provider and advocate, Planned Parenthood's top priority is ensuring that all individuals have access to the health care and information they need, including the full range of reproductive health services, to make positive sexual and reproductive health decisions.

Our education and training team provides comprehensive sexual health education to nearly 7,000 teens and nearly 1,000 parents/guardians each year. We are committed to breaking down barriers that restrict access to health care and education services by ensuring all people receive the care and information they need to stay healthy, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual identity, gender identity, and income. Planned Parenthood uses evidence informed and evidence based interventions to educate youth and young adults on healthy sexuality, pregnancy and disease prevention. We are committed to changing the negative social norm surrounding sexuality because we believe everyone deserves to have healthy sexual lives and experiences which include consensual sexual relationships. Sexual pleasure can be important to our emotional and physical health and well-being.

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England is working with 82 teen peer educators in five communities across the state to provide young people with the skills and resources to be leaders in their community and provide critical information to their peers. The unfortunate reality is that not all young people are guaranteed the right to sexual health education, many schools do not teach it and our peer educators know firsthand how important that information is to their communities in developing healthy relationships and positive sexual experiences.

Through our Generation Program we work with college students across the state to train them on organizing skills to identify problems on their campus and work with their peers to make positive change on their campus community. Every year, students identify sexual violence as a problem that impacts their lives and their communities and now more than ever are demanding institutional and cultural change. Affirmative consent policies ensure a more equitable investigation and this legislation will ensure that all institutions of higher education in the state utilize a standardized definition of affirmative consent in their investigations. Affirmative consent is defined as active, ongoing, positive, conscious and voluntary. The affirmative consent policy demands a culture shift on campuses where historically institutions and systems have perpetuated victim blaming and misogyny by implying that one person has the right to control and violate another person's body unless they explicitly say "no".

Planned Parenthood of Southern New England believes that every individual has the right to determine their own reproductive destiny and understand that right is directly linked to the conditions in their communities. The threat of violence whether it is a college campus, in one's home or in one's community is a threat to their reproductive freedom. We believe every individual deserves the right to live in safe and healthy environments and to control their bodies, their gender and their sexuality—free from violence and exploitation.

We made great progress in our state when public policy was enacted in 2014, Public Act 14-11, to address the social problem and reproductive injustice of sexual violence on campus. We urge you to support *House Bill 5376 An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent* which will strengthen already required educational programming by reinforcing a standard and culture of sexual respect both in college and in life. This is one step further to address the culture of sexual violence in our state and will create a clear and consistent policy for all CT colleges and universities. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.