

-YALE COLLEGE- DEMOCRATS

Testimony of Olivia Paschal
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In favor: H.B. No. 5376
An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent

When I testified before this committee in favor of An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent almost exactly a year ago, we weren't even sure that the bill would get out of committee, let alone make it to a vote on the Senate floor. But – due in large part to the efforts of Senator Flexer, Representative Haddad, and many of the students sitting in this room today – the bill not only made it out of committee, it passed through the Senate almost unanimously, and garnered an overwhelming amount of support in the House.

That swell of support by students and legislators who know and understand the impacts of an affirmative consent standard is a testament to the importance of that standard in promoting a healthy sexual climate on college campuses. The students sitting around you understand that – that's why we're here to advocate on it on a day when we should probably be studying for midterms. The Senate understood that last session – that's why they voted 35-1 in favor of the bill.

Having a sexual policy that focuses on the presence of consent rather than the absence of dissent creates a sexual climate on campus in which assault victims aren't afraid to report, and standards for what constitutes sexual assault are clear and well understood. H.B. 5376 mandates annual programming to educate students on the affirmative consent standard and avenues for reporting sexual misconduct, which ensures that students remain knowledgeable both of what constitutes a consensual sexual encounter and of what options are open to them if nonconsensual sex – an assault – occurs. An affirmative consent standard, in which consent must be ongoing, voluntary, and unambiguous, helps to create a healthy and respectful sexual climate on college campuses.

This should unquestionably be the standard at all colleges in Connecticut. You knew it last session, I knew it last session, the Senate and the majority of the members of the House knew it last session – but this legislation can't wait another year. The prevalence of sexual assault on college campuses is a problem that must be addressed, and although this legislation certainly won't solve it entirely, it's a good start, and an important step for Connecticut to take. So let's get H.B. 5376 out of committee and bring it to a floor vote in both the House and the Senate. We can make college campuses in this state safer, and it's important that we do it now.

