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Testimony of Roger Lopez
Member,
Yale College Democrats

248 York St., N32
New Haven, CT 06511

In favor: H.B. 5376
An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent

It would be puritanical and obsolete to assume that sexual culture is not an integral part of contemporary college culture. Thankfully, Yale does not and chooses to make that explicitly clear to incoming freshmen. As one of the few universities in Connecticut that has adopted an affirmative consent policy, Yale requires matriculating students to internalize the concept in order to ameliorate the sexual environment on its campus.

From my own perspective as a current sophomore that has completed the two sexual climate modules that Yale requires of its underclassmen (one in each freshman and sophomore years), I can attest to the success of the program. As part of freshmen orientation, the first module focuses on teaching students what affirmative consent is and its value. To be clear, affirmative consent is more than an issue of semantics; it is not just an explicit agreement among all participants to engage in sexual activity. "Yes means yes" goes further. In order to fully comprehend affirmative consent, it is necessary to assess why the current model of consent fails. For one, the contemporary sexual script grants that silence or the lack of resistance is sufficient for sexual activity to be consensual. Add to this the societal pressures that encourage men to be aggressive in their pursuit of sexual partners and women's submissive position in the sexual script, and it becomes easy to see how ambiguity can arise in the context of sexual consent.

Affirmative consent, on the other hand, removes any possibility of ambiguity. In fact, it contributes to a sexual atmosphere from which all partners would benefit: it ensures that all participants are not only comfortable but also enthusiastic about the situation at hand. Consent is not a contract between persons engaging in sexual activity; it is a partnership.

Yale and other institutions recognize this principle and have inculcated it in its students. Leading mandatory workshops titled "The Myth of Miscommunication," Yale's Communication and Consent Educators (CCEs)—students who are voluntarily invested in promoting a healthy sexual environment on campus—promote the value of affirmative consent. Fundamentally, it detracts from neither the sexual experience nor the sexual environment while improving both.

As the leader of a pre-orientation program in which I coordinate the activities of a small group of incoming freshmen on a local Connecticut farm for five days prior to orientation, I can also attest to the benefits of affirmative consent from a pedagogical perspective. While we do not explicitly address the issue on these secluded farm trips, the topic of Yale's sexual climate

inevitably arises among our curious freshmen. It is a relief to describe the emphasis that Yale places on affirmative consent; we can rest assured that freshmen enter Yale comfortably equipped with the dialogue to initiate healthy sexual relationships. Yet, with its implementation in only a few Connecticut schools, affirmative consent is currently a privilege. To mandate affirmative consent at all Connecticut colleges and universities would make it a right that all students should possess.