



2 March 2021

Dear Chairman Haskell, Chairman Elliott, and the Joint Committee on Higher Education,

My name is Alison Hagani. I am a constituent of Connecticut and the State Director of Every Voice Coalition CT, a student coalition dedicated to addressing campus sexual violence in Connecticut. I am writing today in unequivocal support for House Bill 6374 and to implore you to immediately act to address campus sexual violence.

Affecting millions of Americans each year, sexual violence has been declared a **“silent violent epidemic”** by the American Medical Association. Here in Connecticut, data reported under the Clery Act showed that there were **436 reported cases of campus sexual violence, stalking and domestic violence** in 2018 alone. Moreover, national statistics estimate that **more than 90%** of sexual assaults go unreported, indicating that the 436 reported cases represent a small fraction of the true number of cases in Connecticut. As this demonstrates, Connecticut is not exempted from this epidemic and must take the necessary legislative measures to further address campus sexual violence, support those impacted, and ensure student safety. HB 6374 is this next step.

While sexual violence looks different for every individual, my experiences with sexual violence continue to complicate the way I move through and navigate my life. The remnants of my experience will likely always transcend stages and years in my life. This, however, is not isolated. Sexual violence often presents mental, physical, emotional, academic, economic, and spiritual ramifications to an individual. While [national data](#) has captured *some* of these ramifications, so much cannot even be quantified. This should raise substantial concerns on the ways sexual violence (and inaction on this issue) is affecting the potential of students and, consequently, the potential of the State.

In this packet, you will find more information on the HB 6374 and its necessity. This includes information on the importance of the *biennial* frequency of the campus climate survey, on the crucial need for statewide amnesty against drugs and alcohol, and on the proven low-cost of these provisions for institutions. This packet also includes some of the myriad endorsements this bill has received.

You are the Joint Committee on Higher Education and Employment Advancement, but your action on this bill (or the lack thereof) will affect the lives of students for years to come. In the best interest of students and survivors, I strongly urge you to immediately vote HB 6374 favorably out of Committee. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions on this bill. You can contact me at [ahagani.everyvoice@gmail.com](mailto:ahagani.everyvoice@gmail.com).

Thank you,

Alison

## ABOUT OUR BILL

### *Timeline:*

In collaboration with students and the CT Alliance to End Sexual Violence, lead sponsor and Higher Education Committee Chair State Senator Will Haskell first filed our Every Voice Bill in January 2020 as “Senate Bill 19.” It received cosponsorship from legislators across both chambers and parties. In February 2020, the Joint Committee on Higher Education held a public hearing for Senate Bill 19, at which dozens of students, advocates, and educators testified in support of the bill. In March 2020, Senate Bill 19 unanimously passed out of the Joint Committee on Higher Education and headed to the House and the Senate for votes to be passed into law. Given the arising needs of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent shutdown of the CGA, the Senate Bill 19 was soon after derailed.

In summer 2020 ahead of the Connecticut General Assembly’s special legislative sessions, more than fifty legislators from both sides of the aisle and both chambers signed onto a letter in support of the immediate passage of the bill. Despite this widespread bipartisan legislative support, as well as continuous strong support from students, the Every Voice Bill was not included on the special session agenda.

Now, during the 2021 legislative session, we remain committed to passing this crucial bill as soon as possible. More than a year has passed since this bill was first filed, reminding us of the necessity of immediate action and the ongoing repercussions of inaction. Students continue to experience sexual violence at alarmingly high rates. Inaction, irrespective of excuses, continues to neglect this severity and to provide students with needed resource. We implore you to act urgently on HB 6374.

### *Bill Components:*

The Every Voice bill has two critical components.

#### **1. Campus climate surveys requirement:**

- Requires universities to administer campus climate surveys every *two* years to collect anonymous data about sexual violence on campus.
- Campus climate surveys serve as a platform for students to safely and anonymously share their experiences if wanted. This is especially important given low rates of reporting among individuals who are impacted by sexual violence. The punitive data that exists through reporting mechanisms fails to capture the true scope of sexual violence.
- *You cannot solve an issue without fully understanding* -- A campus climate survey requirement in CT would equip Connecticut universities with the student insights and stories needed to inform university policy, response,

protections, and resources for those impacted by violence in their community.

- Requiring institutions of higher learning to conduct campus climate surveys is not a significant imposition and confers considerable benefits. Estimated cost (per a report from the Harvard Kennedy School) of implementing this policy per school is around \$3,000. This includes incentives and analysis.
- The bill creates a task force who will oversee this process. From the feedback of universities, we request that you amend Line 222 to remove the option for universities to create their own surveys. The taskforce should rather just approve nationally approved well-constructed survey instruments for universities to use in administering their survey.
- Similar requirements have been enacted in Louisiana, Maryland, New York, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. New York administers survey biennially.

## **2. Amnesty policy requirement:**

- Amnesty policy against drug/alcohol does not penalize students who were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when impacted by violence. This allows students to report without fear of being penalized.
- This is especially important given the prevalence of drugs and alcohol in instances of campus sexual violence.
- All students deserve the opportunity to report or share their experiences, without fear of being penalized or stigmatized.
- Amnesty policy sends a message against victim blaming. By not penalizing students who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol at the time of violence, schools send a message that no student is at fault or punishable for the violence that occurred against them -- no matter the circumstances.

### *The Imperative of Two-Year Campus Climate Survey Frequency*

The Every Voice bill would create a statewide taskforce of higher educational representatives, legislators, students, and violence prevention advocates that will create, approve, and oversee the biennial administering of campus climate surveys at every college and university in the State. **We implore you to advance this bill out of Committee with the specific two-year (biennial) frequency.**

Campus climate surveys are a crucial component of violence prevention on college campuses, granting students an outlet to anonymously share their experiences with sexual violence. In fact, a new study on [Sexual Citizenship](#) conducted at Columbia University found that **students revel in anonymous platforms to share their experiences**, often calling this cathartic. This is also evidenced by the stream of university-specific survivor accounts created this summer. Campus climate surveys

are a safe and anonymous platform for these student insights. These platforms also **benefit colleges and universities** by granting them the insights and data to understand violence on their campus and thus envision meaningful reform. While the principle of the campus climate survey is vastly important, so are its specifics. In particular, the campus climate survey must be administered every two years to reach its potential and maximum efficacy.

**A two-year frequency in the campus climate survey will accommodate the shifting nature of student bodies at Connecticut's community colleges and state schools.** With community colleges, only granting associate's degrees on a two-year schedule, many community college students will never be able to take a campus climate survey, if it occurs every four years. Additionally, according to [statistics from College Factual](#), all public universities in the state (but especially Central, Eastern, Western, Southern, and UConn's many branch campuses) have relatively low first to second year retention rates, relatively low graduation rates, as well as relatively high amounts of incoming and outgoing transfer students. A four-year frequency would disregard this demographic of students. Conversely, a two-year frequency in the campus climate survey would allow more students to communicate their experiences at the institution before potentially moving on or taking time off.

The two-year frequency also ensures greater violence prevention measures, as well as an improved timeline and efficacy when approaching prevention measures and reform mechanisms. **It is essential that universities and colleges evaluate their pre-existing campus culture every two years, rather than four, to capture inadequacies in real-time.** Waiting four years to elicit much-needed data on the prevalence of violence, the accessibility and efficacy of resources, and other key facets of campus culture hurts ongoing attention and commitment to violence prevention. It also fails to correct institutional shortcomings *during* a student's time in college.

In fact, this biennial frequency is also **cost-effective** for higher educational institutions. Results from the survey likely dictate the allocation of resources and energy. The more frequent the survey, the more targeted, efficient, and concentrated these resources are.

These substantial student-benefits co-exist with **the feasibility of a two-year implementation timeline.** In fact, high school students across the state are already participating in a two-year survey for drug-use, called the [Connecticut School Health Survey](#) (CSHS). These surveys understand the dire necessity of understanding and acting upon emerging and ongoing drug use or prevalence frequently and consistently. We must afford the same frequency to university students about sexual violence.

### *Low-Cost of HB 6374*

Connecticut institutions have grossly overestimated the cost of the campus climate survey. Using data from Massachusetts and Maryland, **a report from the Harvard Kennedy School found that the estimated cost of implementing this policy per school is around \$3,000.** This includes incentives and analysis. It is not possible that the campus climate survey would only cost Massachusetts and Maryland around \$3,000 per survey while costing Connecticut around \$25,000 to \$100,000 per survey – as some universities are estimating.

Furthermore, arguments around the cost of this bill for an institution must also encompass discussions around **the cost of inaction and pervasive sexual violence.** The cost of sexual violence for individuals are proven and severe. [CDC findings](#) estimate that the per-survivor cost of rape is around \$100,000. Given the 25 million Americans who have *reported* rape, this costs the economy around \$3.1 trillion dollars, from which government sources pay an estimate of \$1.1 trillion. Similar economic costs occur at the state level, where many claims of sexual violence are adjudicated. As RAINN reports, sexual violence is a “serious and costly public health problem in the U.S.” While means to address sexual violence might yield some cost, addressing sexual violence also saves costs. This, of course, only addresses fiscal costs. Sexual violence costs student survivors far more than money.

Following conversations with colleges and universities, we recommend amending Line 222 to remove the option of institutions creating their own surveys. This reflects feasibility and cost/energy concerns. Some institutions may inflate costs for this survey by adding the cost of an outside consulting firm to their estimate. However, using approved survey instruments does not necessitate an outside consulting firm. If a school wants to add additional question, that is entirely up to them.

Regardless, **the campus climate survey should not incur substantial costs for an institution.** As previous mentioned, amending Line 222 would require institutions to use pre-existing national survey instruments. This reduces their imperative to invest funds and energy into creating their own novel survey. Reusing survey software already used by an institution also greatly cuts down the cost. Furthermore, data analysis of the bill can rely on pre-existing institutional research staff. A new position or funds for hiring are not needed within this bill.

Lastly, the bill’s relatively low-cost is outweighed by the huge return it will provide. The campus climate survey particularly will help schools more efficiently and effectively deploy their resources. Additionally, sexual violence impedes upon the potential and opportunities of students in the State. Addressing this violence, centering student voices, and strengthening support through HB 6374 will allow students to better unleash their potential, from which all of Connecticut benefits.

## *The Imperative of Immediate Action: COVID-19 Campus Life & Red-Zone*

Campus sexual violence is an epidemic sorely in need of immediate and urgent reform. The numbers do not lie: In 2018 alone, 436 cases of campus sexual violence were [reported](#) under the Clery Act in Connecticut. However, given low rates of reporting, these 436 reported cases represent only a small fraction of the true number of cases in Connecticut. In fact, [data](#) from the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) show that more than 90% of students impacted by sexual assault on college campuses do not report their experiences. Another year of legislative inaction equates to hundreds more students debilitated by sexual violence. The lifelong impact of these experiences are immeasurable.

Students have just survived yet another [Red Zone](#), or the first six weeks of college where the majority of instances of campus sexual violence occur. This is the riskiest time for students on college campuses and was exacerbated by the unique conditions imposed by COVID-19. **Legislation must be passed before another Red Zone.**

Amid COVID-19, many students are confined to dorm life with fewer resources readily available to them as staff and faculty members choose to remain remote. All of this is likely to have an additional impact on the persistently high instances of violence traditionally present on college campuses. This mirrors [data](#) on increased rates of domestic violence during the pandemic. Legislative action on the Every Voice Bill, particularly before another Red Zone commences, is essential to the safety of students in the State. With all of the unknown variables and uncertainty during these times, state and university support against sexual violence should be a given.

If passage of this legislation is pushed off yet again, students will go an entire year without the state protections that are especially needed during these difficult times.

### **VAST COSPONSORSHIP & ENDORSEMENTS**

During the 2020 regular session, the Every Voice bill received cosponsors from 15 legislators. During the 2020 special session, more than 50 legislators from both sides of the aisle and both chambers of the CGA signed a letter, calling for members of legislative leadership to include the Every Voice bill on the session agenda and pass it immediately.

Now, during the 2021 regular session, the movement around our bill is only building. More than fifty legislators have cosponsored our bill so far, with surely more to come.

Since being first filed at the beginning of 2020, the Every Voice bill has received many key endorsements from allied organizations and student groups throughout the state. Much of this support came after the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, signaling

the overwhelming commitment to this bill and the impact it would have on support for survivors. *Some of the endorsements are below.*

### **Undergraduate Student Government at the University of Connecticut**

"Tonight was a historic night for the Undergraduate Student Government, and for the Student Senate. A piece of legislation that passed through the External Affairs Committee, attached to the bottom of this letter, puts on display the unwavering support from our organization to ensuring that students at UConn and throughout Connecticut feel safe on campus. Tonight, that bill passed through the Student Senate, where it awaits final confirmation from the Student Body President.

Therefore be it finally resolved the Undergraduate Student Government urges state lawmakers to pass the provisions of SB-19 this month, to protect the well-being of all students in Connecticut."

- September, 2020

### **Yale College Council**

"The Yale College Council (YCC) supports the Every Voice CT Coalition in its mission of increasing resources, attention, and care given to the crisis of sexual misconduct on college campuses. The YCC believes that amnesty for drug and alcohol violations and regular campus-wide surveys are two necessary requirements for colleges and universities to properly address sexual misconduct, and support legislation that requires amnesty and surveys along with the goals of the Every Voice CT Coalition in advocating for legislation to the Connecticut General Assembly."

- November, 2020

### **Student Government Association at Connecticut College**

"Therefore be it resolved, the SGA and the larger student body publicly commits to support and help advance this meaningful legislation in the 2021 Session, so we will begin to foster a relationship with Every Voice CT. Together we can raise awareness and support from the larger Connecticut College community to also endorse this legislation."

- December, 2020

### **Fairfield University Student Association**

"Fairfield University student body supports the passage of HB 6374, endorses the meaningful efforts of Every Voice CT Fairfield, and commits to supporting victims of sexual assault, misconduct, and retaliation on our campus and across Connecticut campuses."

- February, 2021

### **The ACLU of Connecticut**

“We therefore support the provisions of Senate Bill 19 which protect students and employees who, in good faith, report sexual assaults and intimate partner violence in good faith. We recognize that there are often significant barriers to reporting sexual violence and this measure will remove one such barrier – fear of the consequences of necessarily disclosing the survivor’s violation of a collegiate rule or policy.” -2/13/20

### **Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence**

“Alcohol and/or drug use is incredibly common in instances of campus sexual misconduct. In fact, more than half of all instances of campus sexual misconduct involve substance use by either the survivor, perpetrator, or both. Additionally, most students who report having been victimized do not report the assault to any campus resource. Surveys have also shown that students are less likely to report if alcohol is involved. A survivor’s fear that may be punished for personal alcohol or drug violations can be a significant barrier in regards to receiving services, and this is a common barrier. The well-being and safety of survivors after experiencing sexual misconduct is paramount, and if this barrier can be removed for the sake of survivor wellness and safety, it should be.” -2/13/20

### **Connecticut Office of Victim Advocate**

“Connecticut has made important strides to bring awareness to prevent and protect students on college campuses, specifically relating to sexual violence and intimate partner violence. Raised Bill No. 19 will enhance those efforts by establishing a Council on Sexual Misconduct Climate Study to evaluate the school's programs and the student's response to those programs.”

### **Connecticut Federation of College Republicans**

“We are excited to endorse SB-19 and the efforts of the Every Voice Coalition. This is commonsense legislation that addresses the prevalence of sexual violence on college campuses and the institutional barrier that too often undermines survivor rights. Furthermore, the Every Voice Coalition has done a tremendous job of amplifying student voices on campuses throughout the state, a testament to their grassroots impact and the importance of this legislation. We encourage legislators to pass SB-19 with bipartisan support in order to help make our campuses the safe spaces that they should be.” -5/22/20

### **College Democrats of Connecticut**

“As an organization that represents the best interests and welfare of students all over the state, we are thrilled to endorse SB-19 and the tremendous advocacy work of the Every Voice Coalition, a student-run group that is focused on addressing the crisis of sexual violence on college campuses. This bipartisan legislation is a giant step in the

right direction when it comes to affirming survivor rights and shedding light on the realistic scope sexual violence on the state's campuses. It is time that we stand up for survivors and say that enough is enough. We call upon both chambers of the General Assembly and members of both parties to come together, do the right thing, and pass SB-19." -5/22/20

### **Connecticut Young Democrats**

"The Connecticut Young Democrats organization is proud to endorse SB-19, *An Act Concerning Sexual Misconduct On College Campuses*. We fully support the implementation of a campus climate survey and protecting those students who report sexual assault, stalking, or violence from any ensuing disciplinary action by the institution of higher education. Survivors and/or witnesses of misconduct should not have to think twice about coming forward for fear of such punishment."

### **Congress of Connecticut Community Colleges**

"The 4Cs supports SB 19 and its efforts to create a sexual misconduct climate survey for our state's higher education institutions and protecting students that are victims or witnesses to an assault from disciplinary action. We hope this tool will give us a greater understanding of the pervasiveness of sexual assault on our campuses, so we can find stronger means of prevention." -2/13/20