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SEN. FLEXER, REP. HADDAD WELCOME STUDENT TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF AFFIRMATIVE CONSENT BILL

State Senator Mae Flexer (D-Killingly) and state Representative Gregory Haddad (D-Mansfield) today welcomed overwhelming student and other support for this year's Affirmative Consent bill during its public hearing before the Higher Education Committee.

Sen. Flexer and Rep. Haddad are co-sponsors of House Bill 5376, AN ACT CONCERNING AFFIRMATIVE CONSENT, which would require all public and private state universities and colleges in Connecticut to establish 'affirmative consent' as the threshold in campus investigations of sexual assault and intimate partner violence cases.

The bill seeks to clarify school policies about what 'consent' is and provide consistency state-wide, and it builds on the unanimous legislation to combat sexual violence on college campuses passed in 2014. The bill also provides clarity for university disciplinary boards hearing sexual assault cases.

"Today we heard invigorating testimony on why Affirmative Consent is needed on college campuses across Connecticut from the very people who it is intended to protect: the college students themselves. We need to change the conversation on college campuses from 'no means no' to 'yes means yes.' This bill is a big step toward reducing the risk of rape that afflicts so many campuses in Connecticut and across the nation," said **Sen. Flexer**, who is Senate Vice-Chair of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee and whose Senate district includes UConn, Eastern Connecticut State University and Quinebaug Valley Community College. "It is the voices of these informed and intelligent young men and women that have driven this process so far, and to whom this legislature owes a robust debate, a higher expectation of safety, and a clear and consistent standard of protection no matter what state university or college they attend."

"Sexual assault on college campuses is an epidemic that we must act to address," said **Rep. Haddad**, who is a member of the Higher Education Committee and whose House

district includes UConn. “Updating the standard for consent from ‘no means no’ to ‘yes means yes’ recognizes that silence is not consent. By creating a uniform definition of consent, this legislation gives every college student in Connecticut equal protection from sexual assault. I’m hopeful that the bill will pass this year and that soon all Connecticut colleges and universities will use an affirmative consent standard.”

In addition to various public policy advocates and college administrators testifying today in support of the bill, at least 16 college students spoke today in support of Affirmative Consent.

“As a student, I feel safer with an affirmative consent standard. Older definitions of consent – ones that relied on a “no means no” framework – can potentially be problematic, as such a standard can suggest that the absence of a vocalized “no” constitutes consent. Yet that is not the case. It is possible that an individual is feeling pressured, threatened or coerced into a sexual activity, and may be frightened to say no – yet that individual is not consenting,” testified **Austin Longendyke, a graduate student at UConn**. “Affirmative consent protects students in such a situation, as in an investigation using the new standard, the absence of a no could not be confused as granting consent to the sexual activity.”

“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,” testified **Yale University student Olivia Paschal**. “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.”

“As the coordinator of Violence against Women programs at the Central Connecticut State University’s Ruthe Boyea Women’s Center, I advocate for survivors of sexual violence and domestic violence through two annual events, ‘The Walk of No Shame’ and ‘Take Back the Night.’ Both events have a ‘Speak Out’ portion, where survivors of sexual violence and domestic violence share their stories and receive support from the CCSU community,” said **Gretchen Marino of Central Connecticut State University**. “During the Speak Out, many students find support and solidarity with other survivors who tell their stories because their stories sound so similar to each other. ‘I was too drunk to agree to that’ or ‘I never said yes’ are often repeated during the Speak Out from survivors who tell their stories. Affirmative Consent would prevent those sexual assaults from ever happening.”

The Higher Education and Advancement Committee has until March 15 to act on the bill.

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