
18-20 Trinity St., Hartford, CT 06106 • 860/240-8300 • pcsw@cga.ct.gov • www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw/

CONTACT: Christine Palm, Communications Director at 860/240-8449; or 860/836-2145

Bipartisan Progress on Key Women's Legislative Initiatives

6 Bills in 6 Days

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HARTFORD – Six key bills that would significantly improve the lives of women in Connecticut advanced over the last six session days with bipartisan support.

The General Assembly supported legislation aimed at improving campus safety, evidence collection in cases of rape, workplace sexual harassment protection for interns, support for female veterans, anti-trafficking laws, and prevention of so-called “revenge porn.”

Late last night (Tuesday, May 19), the Senate passed **S.B. 636: An Act Concerning Affirmative Consent**, which will build upon last year’s groundbreaking campus sexual assault legislation to “require institutions of higher education to include in their sexual assault, stalking and intimate partner violence policies affirmative consent, which means active, clear and voluntary agreement to engage in sexual activity...”

If the House passes S.B. 636 and it is signed into law by Gov. Malloy, Connecticut will become the second state to enact this important step toward preventing and addressing sexual violence.

“In passing Affirmative Consent, the Senate, under the leadership of Sen. Mae Flexer, has effectively challenged old notions of sexual violence and victim blaming,” said PCSW Senior Policy Analyst Jillian Gilchrest.

“This vote helps change the conversation on college campuses from ‘no means no’ to ‘yes means yes,’ and it creates a higher expectation of safety for all of our young men and women,” said Flexer, who is Senate vice-chair of the Higher Education and Employment Committee and whose Senate district includes UConn, Eastern Connecticut State University and Quinebaug Valley Community College. “For years we have been operating under a two-tier system here in Connecticut when it comes to the definition of ‘consent’ in student disciplinary hearings. Today’s bill evens the playing field so that every student in Connecticut now has the same expectation of protection and safety no matter what college or university they attend.”

And Carolyn Treiss, executive director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), said, “This law sends an unambiguous message to the entire campus community that sexual intimacy must be a voluntarily shared experience and that no one has the right to presume a sense of entitlement over another person’s body.”

According to Laura Cordes, executive director of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS), “Connecticut lawmakers continue to lead in addressing sexual violence and we are glad to have the support of PCSW in our work to end sexual violence and secure stronger protections for victims and survivors. The adoption of a uniform affirmative consent standard throughout our higher education system (in SB 636) will promote dialogue about healthy sexuality and increase offender accountability.”

In addition to Affirmative Consent, five other significant bills advanced over the last week that indicate bipartisan support for women’s issues. Last Wednesday, the House of Representatives passed, without opposition, **H.B. 6498:An Act Concerning the Timely Transfer and Processing of Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits**. The bill is aimed at expediting the handling of critical evidence in sexual assault cases and would set up strict timelines during which police must retrieve rape evidence kits from hospitals and bring them to the state’s forensic lab for testing.

S.B. 904:An Act Establishing the Connecticut Women Veterans’ Program, which acknowledges the need for programing tailored for female veterans, passed both the Senate and House, and is now on its way to Gov. Malloy for his signature.

H.B. 6849:An Act Strengthening Protections for Victims of Human Trafficking, a Governor’s bill, which says that a minor engaged in the sex trade is presumed to be a victim of trafficking rather than a prostitute, was passed by the House and is awaiting a vote in the Senate.

S.B.428: An Act Protecting Interns from Workplace Sexual Harassment and Discrimination was approved by the Senate and awaits a vote in the House.

And H.B. 6921: An Act Concerning Invasions of Privacy, was voted through the House unanimously Tuesday night. This bill strengthens the state’s laws against voyeurism and outlaws the sharing of intimate images without the subject’s consent.

“What this past week shows is that elected officials on both sides of the aisle are making a priority of women’s health and safety,” said Gilcrest. “We are heartened that – despite divisions on other legislative initiatives – both parties are sending a clear message that they care about improving the lives of women, who make up more than half the population.”

About the PCSW: The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was formed in 1973 under Sec. 46a-1 of the Connecticut General Statutes to study and improve Connecticut women’s economic security, health and safety; to promote consideration of qualified women to leadership positions and to work toward the elimination of gender discrimination. As a non-partisan arm of the General Assembly, the agency monitors, critiques and recommends changes to legislation in order to inform public policy, and assesses programs and practices in all State agencies for their effect on the state’s women. The PCSW serves as a liaison between government and its diverse constituents, and convenes stakeholders, including the business, non-profit and educational communities, local governments, and the media, in order to promote awareness of women’s issues.