



Testimony

By

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University of Connecticut**

**Select Committee on Children
Judiciary Committee
Joint Informational Hearing on Mandated Reporters of Child Abuse**

Tuesday, January 24, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to address you on this important topic. My name is Nicole Fournier Gelston and I am a legal specialist at the University of Connecticut's Attorney General's office. With me today are Rachel Rubin, President Herbst's Chief of Staff, and Elizabeth Conklin, the University's Title IX Coordinator and Interim Associate Vice-President of the Office of Diversity and Equity.

The University of Connecticut has always been committed to ensuring a safe yet welcoming environment for students, employees and visitors, and complying with all relevant laws. The University's Code of Conduct and policies have long set an expectation that the actions of University community members reflect fundamental moral and ethical values, in accordance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations.

To further promote compliance with those expectations, the University expects shortly to adopt the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy. The purpose of this policy is to

remind University employees who are “mandated reporters” under the law of their reporting obligations, educate employees as to what constitutes child abuse or neglect under the law, and encourage those employees who are not mandated reporters to report suspected child abuse by reminding them that they are entitled to protection under the law for all such reports made in good faith, even if that report is later found unsubstantiated. UConn is fully committed to legal compliance, and the training to make compliance a reality.

In addition, the University expects to adopt a Sexual Assault Response Policy which would require most university employees to report to one of three explicitly designated offices, including the University’s Title IX Coordinator, any sexual assault observed by or reported to them. This reporting obligation would necessarily include instances of observed or reported sexual assaults of minors. This policy reflects a difficult but important balance between the needs and concerns of victims and the responsibility to provide a safe campus environment to UConn students and the greater University community. If the victim of a sexual assault is a minor, prompt reporting to DCF will be required by law and the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy. In addition, prompt reporting to the University will be required pursuant to the Sexual Assault Response Policy.

The University hopes and expects that the Board of Trustees will approve both the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy and the Sexual Assault Response Policy at its next meeting, scheduled to take place tomorrow, January 25, 2012. The University’s Office of Audit, Compliance and Ethics is prepared to begin training immediately on both policies following approval. Training through the Office of Audit, Compliance and Ethics is mandatory for all employees and the University requires and receives 100% compliance. Training on these

new policies will supplement the mandatory Sexual Harassment Prevention Training that the University has required of employees for the past several years.

The University of Connecticut is, of course, an institution of higher education. As such, the vast majority of our students are eighteen and over. The University recognizes, however, that its responsibilities may extend to individuals under the age of eighteen, whether those individuals are enrolled as students, are involved in 4-H programs, come to campus as part of the University's K-12 outreach efforts, or participate in the Child Development Labs program. The University believes its existing policies and practices, in combination with the adoption of the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy and the Sexual Assault Response Policy, afford appropriate protections to the younger members of the University community.

The University does, in addition, permit the use of its facilities and grounds by privately owned businesses for the purpose of running camps and other programs which are attended primarily or exclusively by individuals under the age of eighteen. Although private companies and their employees are not governed by University policies, the University can impose contractual obligations in its Facility Use Agreements. Therefore, in those cases in which a private business seeks to use University facilities for a summer camp or other program geared toward minors, the University going forward will require, as a condition of the use of its facilities, that the private owner contractually obligate itself to verify that all employees, prior to commencement of the camp or other program, are fully apprised of and trained on their reporting obligations pursuant to 17a-101 through 17a-103a of the Connecticut General Statutes:

The University is confident that its current practices and policies, reinforced by the adoption of the UConn Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy and the Sexual Assault Response Policy, and the implementation of more stringent Facility Use Agreements with its external partners, afford the best possible protections to all members of the University community.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify today and the General Assembly's long-standing support for UConn. We would be happy to answer any questions.