

Sexual Assaults in the College Community - 2017

The LWVNJ believes that college and university policies, as well as legislative educational programs, should define, prevent, report, and combat inappropriate sexual behaviors broadly defined as “sexual misconduct” as well as criminal behaviors leading to sexual assault and rape against both women and men within the college campus community. Preventive measures should begin early and continue through the college years, address attitudes such as “rape culture,” and ensure that all parties understand the concept and importance of consent (and the implications of alcohol and drugs for it). Education should also ensure that students understand school policies, legal definitions, penalties, and other relevant information. Support, counseling, and legal protection for victims must be provided. Campus administration, in cooperation with local police, should play an active role in preventing and dealing with sexual misconduct.

Explanatory Statement

The LWVNJ believes that college and university policies, as well as legislative educational programs, should define, prevent, report, and combat inappropriate sexual behaviors broadly defined as “sexual misconduct” as well as criminal behaviors leading to sexual assault and rape against both women and men within the college campus community. Failing to do so can lead to an environment destructive to the emotional, physical and mental well-being of all students and can undermine the academic environment of the campuses, which should be places of safety and educational attainment.

The League believes both legislation and changes in institutional policies can help prevent campus sexual assault.

The League supports and encourages campus authorities and local law enforcement cooperation in investigating, prosecuting and penalizing abusers in accordance with state law.

Educational measures

With an understanding of how the prevalence of “rape culture” in American society impacts sexual behaviors on campus communities, the League of Women Voters of New Jersey believes that educational and awareness programs should be established early, with age appropriate programs commencing in middle school and continuing throughout high school and college. These educational programs should include information about the behaviors commonly associated with rape culture and how they may lead to sexual violence, sexual discrimination, and sexual harassment and intimidation. They should also cover additional outright anti-societal and possibly criminal behaviors which include lewdness, stalking, genital exposure, unwelcome sexual contact and advances, as well as the use of social media to advance or demonstrate any of the above sexual misconducts.

Additionally, proposed and properly taught educational measures should include examples and models of healthy relationships; the responsibility of all parties to understand and abide by the an appropriate consent policy; and most importantly, that a condition of intoxication or drug influence renders an individual incapable of giving valid consent to sexual activity. League members agree that both partners clearly saying "yes" throughout the sexual encounter is a good indicator of the presence of consent, but we did not reach consensus on the "no means no" standard, since many members would support either standard, if properly used.

Also to be included in educational measures are the criminal definitions, legal protections, possible college ramifications and criminal punishments for sexual assaults and reporting strategies in the community. These educational measures should be ongoing throughout the calendar year through multiple communication mediums, kept up to date and accurate, and encourage the importance of reporting incidents of sexual assault.

Administrative

The League of Women Voters of New Jersey supports Higher Education Administration strategies that would thwart illegal sexual misconduct and sexual assaults on our New Jersey Campus communities, including an active partnership/cooperative contract with local police departments and local rape crisis centers to strengthen sexual assault prevention and response programs. Other strategies should include climate surveys, timely and efficient methods of reporting a sexual assault, with publicly-displayed notices of these methods, confidential and empathetic interviews, on-call rape crisis counselors and sexual assault nurse examiners, legal representation for all involved parties and publicly stated and enforced college life consequences for alleged perpetrators of sexual assaults.

Position History

The study was approved at Convention 2015. The position was approved in April 2017.