

## A Great Start: Ontario's New Legislation to End Sexual Violence

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As of March 2016, Ontario's Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act<sup>i</sup>, also known as Bill 132 has received Royal Assent. Part of the Bill requires that all universities and colleges province-wide work in collaboration with students to develop standalone policies on sexual violence and harassment. The aspect of student involvement will "help to ensure the policy is responsive to the needs of the campus community. In Addition, consultation and collaboration will help foster a shared concern and responsibility, for taking action to create a safe, respectful and inclusive campus."<sup>ii</sup> Some universities across the province already have stand-alone policies in place, while others affirm that they are currently in the drafting process.

Currently, even with the considerable lack of legislation regarding sexual violence in universities, it has to be said that most currently offer a range of on campus support for survivors, along with providing links to off-campus services. Stand-alone policies should serve to enrich current resources available to survivors (and possibly introduce new ones). However, this is only a start to addressing the problem. If the goal is to end sexual violence, then in addition to developing separate policies, we must endeavour to challenge the culture that remains apathetic to the atrocity.

Along with stand-alone policies, universities should also implement sexual violence and harassment prevention programs. As of 2010, The University of Windsor is conducting research studies into the effectiveness of the *Bringing in the Bystander*® *In Person Prevention Workshop*. The Workshop was originally developed by researchers at the University of New Hampshire, and has since been adopted by universities across the United States. The program takes what they call a "community of responsibility approach"<sup>iii</sup>. As potential bystanders, students are trained to identify and responsibly intervene in the event of a possible assault. In doing so, they "learn the importance of speaking out against social norms that support sexual assault and coercion...and how to be an effective and supportive ally to survivors."<sup>iv</sup> York University also has a bystander intervention program in development. The hope is that universities will develop similar programs in conjunction with the new policies.

The passing of Bill 132 is a great victory in the fight to protect survivors of sexual violence and harassment. However, we need to acknowledge that we live in a culture that still accepts these behaviours. We must challenge these encompassing values, in order to end the cycle of sexual violence. Until then, sexual violence will continue to occur, even with stand-alone policies in place.

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<sup>i</sup> Bill 132, Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act Supporting Survivors and Challenging Sexual Violence and Harassment, 2016. Schedule 3, (4) "A college of University described in subsection (2) shall ensure that student input is considered, in accordance with any regulations in the development of its sexual violence policy and every time the policy is reviewed or amended;" Online:

[http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills\\_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=3535](http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&BillID=3535)

<sup>ii</sup> OCUFA and CAUT submission regarding Bill 132, Sexual Violence and Harassment Action Plan Act, January 2016, page 8. Online:

<http://ocufa.on.ca/assets/OCUFA-and-CAUT-Bill-132-Submission-January-22-2016-FINAL-.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Bringing in the Bystander® In-Person Prevention Program. (n.d.). Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <http://cola.unh.edu/prevention-innovations-research-center/bringing-bystander®-person-prevention-program>

<sup>iv</sup> Empowering Student Bystanders. (n.d.). Retrieved March 31, 2016, from <http://www1.uwindsor.ca/bystander/>