

January 17, 2007

Re: Opposition to Raised Senate Bill No. 126 & Raised House Bill No. 5258

Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I could sit here in front of you today and quote statistics but instead I am going to tell you a story. This is the story of me. I used to be alive. There used to be a song in my heart, a sparkle in my eyes and laughter that was contagious. Then one evening in the middle of the night my former husband broke into my house, kidnapped and repeatedly raped me in the presence of my children. That was the day that I lost my freedom, my life and my soul.

I had been abused at his hand before. He had done this sporadically throughout our marriage but he was escalating to a dangerous place. He was out on bond pending sentencing in another domestic violence charge and pled guilty to assaulting a police officer and was to serve 8 months. He left in June of 2001 and I did not see him for months until his final act that has him incarcerated currently. During this time, he continued to call and harass me and threatened me in every way imaginable. He had built up 6 cases in the courts by the time he did come back and did this to me, and ran again. Finally, the New Hampshire authorities did pick him up and he was returned to CT three weeks later.

When he was arraigned in a CT court it was in the papers the following day. I was under the impression that the Rape shield law in CT would have been able to protect my privacy but I was wrong. This only prevented my name from being printed. There is one catch...He was charged with sexual assault in a spousal relationship and I have his last name. It also allowed for my street to be published and I live on a dinky side street so basically it was in the papers, internet, and then all over the radio and on the local cable news that night.

There were two papers that covered this story, the Register Citizen and the Waterbury Republican. The register in the end allowed for the truth to be told and the republican basically blamed me for what happened to me and my kids.

Press coverage is all about sound bites, one liners and speedy coverage. You can not erase the slant that the reporter brings to the table, the need to be the first to report the story and what news sells.

We may have a constitutional right to a free press but really the motive behind the press is money and viewers and what will attract both. Sex sells....Beating people up sells...drama is eye-catching...violence in all forms...makes money. It is one thing to warn the public about a predator, but it is unacceptable to use someone's tragedy as entertainment.

I believe that I had the right to sleep through the night in my home without anyone breaking in, kidnapping and raping me. I have since learned that not to be true. I have the right to complain afterward and then go through the courts to attempt to get justice. Really, you should understand that in cases like mine there is no such thing as justice. There is just a long, overwhelming, humiliating, and completely embarrassing process that you have to go through in the hope that this will not be done to you again.

Not only did I have to go through a criminal trial but I also had to go through a divorce and had that aired out in the public. I had to go through the numerous court hearings that were mere entertainment to him and I was forced to have to fight for custody of our daughter. I was forced to defend myself against him again and he was outright lying. I was accused of embezzlement, adultery, lying, cheating and so on. He had the public defender's office helping him through a divorce and instead of telling him to agree to the divorce; this was one of many vehicles used to harass me, a crime victim. He was in his prison outfit, leg irons and hand cuffs calling me to testify and essentially calling me a loser in open court. I could not have my lawyer say to the judge that this man is horrible and a divorce should be granted because he is a rapist because he was not yet convicted.

Through this I had to work to feed and support my children, go to the store and try to live without my soul. The only thing that I did have going for me was that my name and picture were not being published at the time. Everyone knew about me...but they did not know it was me. I was able to go buy gas at the gas station and get a coffee and hear the gossip about me and then go on with my day. I had to go to work every day and face my co-workers and not know if they read the papers or not and if they figured it out that it was me that was raped. I also had to deal with the people who said that I was making it up as revenge. Who would volunteer to be put through this...I don't know but I can tell you it was not me.

I have chosen to give up my anonymity for one reason. I want domestic violence to stop. I want people to keep their hands to themselves and I especially want my children to never know this pain that I will live with for the rest of my days. If anyone thinks about touching one of my girls I want them to think twice before they do because not only they be dealing with the police and the court system but dealing with me.

I am of the opinion that any crime victim should have the right to refuse to allow cameras in the court room and that should be absolute...no right to a hearing...no may be granted or denied...domestic violence and sexual assault are severely under reported as it is. There is a legitimate concern for the victim suffering more harm through a criminal process and I think that if you allow defendants to decide this issue also then you are just giving the defense another tool to use to intimidate a witness. If the victim wants to have a camera in court and they are ok with this it should be allowed but you also face the possibility that there is going to be a person watching who is being abused who will not report it because they see on TV what it really is like to go through a trial. They will continue to suffer because they are of the opinion that this beating is better than having your dirty laundry aired before God and man.

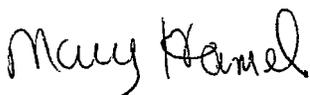
I want you to understand that I believe in checks and balances and I know that the press can be a very effective tool used to achieve this goal. But the sad reality is that the press does not seem to care about collateral consequences that come from reporting stories like mine. Defense attorneys are acutely aware of this and use it to destroy victims.

But let me ask you, does the press really hold accountable all the players in our judicial system? NO! The judicial branch can be held accountable without sacrificing the privacy or further traumatizing sexual assault victims and/ or domestic violence victims and their children. Did the press report that I tried and tried to get help from the police and got nothing? Did they report that the police had independent corroboration that my ex-husband was coming to get me and that he wasn't ranting like a lunatic, which is what they told me? Did the press report that the New Hampshire authorities refused to honor warrants that were in Connecticut to arrest and hold him before he raped me? And that they knew where he was all along? Did the press know this, Yes they did. They were able to read the police reports that were sealed from me. They knew, did not report it and continued to blame me for being raped.

They did not report the continued abuse that I suffered at the hands of the judicial process through the divorce. They did not report how my rapist was using the process to get a change of scenery, at attempt to continue to threaten and control me, or tried to ruin me financially.

I also know that the warning signs for abuse are not included in every domestic violence story...actually I would be surprised to see that. But every time a famous man gets prostrate trouble I am made well aware of the signs and symptoms and I don't possess a prostrate. I think the press should step up to the plate and do what is RIGHT or stay out of the court room all together because the immoral can not hold the shameful accountable.

Connecticut has been on the cutting edge when it comes to Victim's Rights yet there is still so much more that needs to be done. I never relinquished my rights when I was raped. I had no choice in the matter. I think that we should as a state continue to be on the front lines fighting for victim's rights, dignity, allowing them to regain their self respect, and go from victim to survivor.



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