

Campus Sexual Assault: NJCASA Responds to A3652

The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) is the statewide advocacy and capacity building organization that represents the twenty-one county-based rape crisis centers, and the Rutgers University Office of Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCASA elevates the voice of sexual violence survivors and service providers by advocating for survivor-centered legislation, training allied professionals, and supporting statewide prevention strategies that work to address and defy the socio-cultural norms that permit and promote rape culture.

Since the White House Council on Women and Girls' "Not Alone" report was published in January 2014, NJCASA has received an unprecedented number of inquiries from the press, policy makers, and various stakeholders on the issue of campus based sexual assault. Conceptually, A3652 (NJ SAVE Act) addresses three main content areas that are recognized by NJCASA, and other sexual violence leaders throughout the country, as essential for addressing, and reducing sexual assault on college campuses – supportive services for survivors, prevention, and offender accountability.

As a survivor advocacy organization, NJCASA encourages consideration of the following points in order to increase the efficacy of this legislation and to support our collective interests in appropriately serving survivors and holding offenders accountable.

1) Mandated reporting

- a. NJCASA advocates for a survivor-centered approach that provides the opportunity for survivors to *choose* whether or not they would like to involve police. As identified by the FBI, rape is the second most violent crime, the first of which is murder. When someone is sexually assaulted, their *choice* is taken from them. Their crime scene is their body. A survivor centered approach honors the unique path upon which each survivor embarks and recognizes that a policy that requires that *all* reports of an alleged sexual assault prompt a police notification are likely, in fact, to reduce the number of survivors who come forward. This is likely to lead to underreporting of sexual assault and underutilization of survivor services. We're all interested in increasing the number of offenders held accountable for their crimes, but NJCASA contends, as do our colleagues in the rest of the country, that *advising* students of their legal rights and options will increase the number of survivors seeking counseling/advocacy services, which will ultimately lead to an increased number of students

who feel comfortable reporting to law enforcement. The key is to follow the survivor's lead. This is also very much in line with New Jersey's strong SART response model.

2) Confidential Sexual Violence Advocates

- a. NJCASA supports increasing the availability of, and access to, Confidential Sexual Violence Advocates. An Advocate plays a critical role in helping a survivor understand his/her legal options, availability of services, etc. As with "mandated reporting", NJCASA encourages that the legislation require that a survivor be *offered* access to an Advocate, rather than one be appointed. Again, a survivor centered approach to supporting sexual assault survivors provides for the survivor to determine which services they'd like to access, and when.
- b. NJCASA also cautions that there be consideration as to the important training through which Confidential Sexual Violence Advocates must participate in New Jersey. The 40-hours of mandated training, provided by a lead sexual violence service organization in each county, not just ensures that Advocates have the skills and knowledge necessary to appropriately and compassionately support a survivor, but also provides that Advocate with privileged communication status, an important component to ensuring that the confidentiality of each survivor is maintained and honored.

3) Prevention

- a. NJCASA supports providing access to interventions such as SCREAM Theater, however, cautions that campus based prevention, in order to be effective, cannot be limited to a one-time intervention during student orientation. NJCASA also contends that one of the reasons why SCREAM Theater is such a successful prevention intervention at Rutgers University, is that it is managed and supported by professionals for whom this subject matter is their area of expertise. The students are highly trained and the campus has the appropriate supports in place to use this intervention as just one *piece* of a sexual assault prevention strategy.
- b. NJCASA supports the belief that prevention messages must saturate a campus community in order to be effective. Primary prevention addresses sexual violence before it occurs. Bystander intervention strategies provide tools for students to actively address and reduce rape culture on campus. Strong offender accountability policies also reduce perpetration by increasing the risks associated with getting caught. The ways in which faculty and staff empower women and promote healthy masculinity also supports a strong prevention infrastructure. All of this is prevention and speaks to the need for campuses to work intentionally to shift the culture on their campus to one that leaves little room for the perpetuation of rape culture. Effective prevention simply cannot stop at a one-time intervention.



Since 2010, NJCASA has been working with a variety of New Jersey colleges/universities in our College Consortium, which has provided an opportunity for campus leaders to share best practices in regards to sexual assault on campus. This was way before the “Not Alone” report was disseminated. The proactive presence of these schools in this dialogue over the last four years reminds us of the fact that, in many ways, New Jersey continues to be leading by example.

What we’ve pleasantly seen recently is a diverse pool of stakeholders, all with great intentions, engaged in the topic of campus sexual assault. For those of us who have been working within this field for some time, it’s not a new conversation, but we are thrilled to have the opportunity to have the ears of the media, policy makers, and the community leaders who can create sustainable change.

The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault asks that we move forward with cautious earnest. That we spend the time necessary to really understand the change we seek and the implications and impact various policies may have on survivors. It is our position that to create a system that does anything less than offer a full range of survivor-centered options is to negate the purpose of engaging in these conversations at all. When we work within a system that provides the space and support necessary for a survivor to heal, we *will* find more perpetrators and we *will* help more survivors. Survivors *will* come forward when they know they can trust us. When we show we believe them, support them, and respect them. When they finally feel like they’re *not alone*.

