

Letters To The Editor



Victims' names should remain secret, Alamance Rape Crisis Alliance says

To The Editor:

We are writing to respond to several concerns that were raised in the last issue of the Pendulum (March 10, 1994). In an effort to confront the problem of date rape on the Elon College campus, we believe that you have, perhaps unintentionally, opened a Pandora's Box when it comes to victim's rights. Rape Crisis Alliance of Alamance County has served as an advocate for victims of sexual violence in our community for over 15 years. In that capacity, our agency has worked on numerous cases handled by the Elon College Police Department. This Department is very aware of what a serious problem date rape is on the Elon College campus, and we feel that they work hard to make prosecution possible. However, it is the District Attorney who makes the decision as to whether or not a case will be prosecuted. The task of informing the victim of that decision usually falls back upon the investigating officers. This leads some individuals to believe that law enforcement has a more influential role in determining if a case will be pursued by the State. Very few date rape cases are prosecuted in our County, regardless of the law enforcement agency involved.

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While we would like to see more cases taken to trial, because the complaints of these victims are quite real, we also acknowledge that they are often difficult cases to prove to a jury's satisfaction.

Your "Viewpoint" editorial asked the question "Who is Police Chief Dan Ingle protecting by keeping secret the names of

rape victims? His department or the women involved?" Let us assure you that it would be much simpler for police departments to treat cases involving sexual assaults just as they do other cases. But because of the special nature of these crimes and the devastating effect they have on the lives of victims, most law enforcement agencies have implemented special protocols for handling these situations. These protocols, along with the recent law that temporarily withholds the names of a complaining witness, work to a victim's benefit and help to protect their rights.

By way of illustration, let's consider how a typical assault case might develop. In Alamance County, a victim of rape or sexual assault would be referred to one of the local hospitals to receive medical treatment for injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, possible pregnancy, and to collect physical evidence. When this person is admitted to the hospital as the result of a sexual assault, law enforcement is notified. An officer will speak with the victim and fill out an incident report. This will include the name and address of the victim, since she/he is the "complaining witness" should the State of North Carolina (as represented by District Attorney Steve Balog), choose to press criminal charges. At this point, the name and address of the "complaining witness" becomes public information. Note that this is before a decision has been made as to whether the case will be prosecuted. No warrant has been issued, no arrests made. Without the new law protecting the identity of the victim and the cooperation of law enforcement in withholding a victim's name, anyone could have access to that information.

Your paper has a policy of not printing victims' names; but there are other newspapers in our County who will happily print any victim's name. In terms of

physical safety, public information of this sort can give an attacker vital information about a victim if he wishes to inflict further harm or intimidate the victim into recanting. Withholding a name also provides the victim with some emotional and psychological safety. Victims of sexual violence deserve to be able to go about the difficult business of

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putting their lives back together without some "well meaning" reporter confronting them about the very thing they are trying hardest to put behind them. Keep in mind, if the District Attorney chooses to prosecute a case, the names of all parties involved become public record at that time. For a case to come to trial, a victim must be prepared to place herself/himself in the public eye. But that is the victim's choice. In a sexual assault, the assailant creates a situation where the victim has no choice. WE must be careful that, in an effort to deal with the problem, we do not revictimize by taking away a victim's options. The public's "right to know" cannot supersede the physical and emotional well being of its individuals members.

Sadly, this Pandora's Box has far reaching consequences. The State Attorney General's Office, in response to what appears to be pressure from the North Carolina Press Association, has issued instructions to law enforcement agencies state wide that will restrict their ability to use this new law to protect the privacy of

HILLARY, UH, GIVE ME A HAND WITH THIS CLOSET!



sexual assault victims in the future. We see this as a step backward in the fight against sexual violence. From this group, only 25 complaints were filed with local law enforcement agencies. A handful of those cases went to court. Historically, one of the main causes of this low reporting pattern is victim concern about loss of privacy. As this whirlwind blows around law enforcement's procedures, and District Attorney's policies, and "uncooperative" victims who won't come forward to be identified, what have we forgotten? What about the sexual offenders? They must be relishing this great diversion. The time has come to shift the scrutiny experienced by victims and those trying to serve them, to the assailants. We must shift the focus to those among us who engage in, and/or condone sexual violence. Put the "power of the press" to work in a more meaningful way. Confront the social attitudes and myths that support sexual violence, hold individuals accountable for behaviors that violate or degrade other people, and acknowledge the violence issues that are a part of life for far too many individuals.

Holly Lauritsen
Rape Crisis Alliance
of Alamance County

More about parking

To The Editor:

In your Viewpoint section of The Pendulum dated Feb. 24, 1994. You stated that parking in the North end of Jordan Center was where construction workers park. Incorrect, they park in the South end, right behind the Pantry. Also, those students who claim to have gotten tickets for parking in the North end overflow section is because they failed to get a valid campus parking permit for the current year.

J. Laurence DeBerry

All letters are printed exactly as they are received.

Corrections:

The Pendulum strives to report the news accurately and will correct errors that come to its attention.

Bloomsburg University beat Elon, 7-0 in a softball tournament two weeks ago. *The Pendulum* incorrectly stated the university as Bloomsdale College.