

Every year there are approximately 321,500 victims of rape and sexual assault in the United States. We can no longer continue to look away. It's not going to just go away.

Recent headlines show our complacency and our tolerance for behaviors that normalize acts of sexual violence, even as 44% of women and 23% of men experience some form of sexual violence during their lifetime.

As a society, as a community, as a nation, we must stop trying to dismiss sexual assault. We must believe victims, we must support victims, and we must hold perpetrators accountable for their actions.

The stereotypes that question how long a victim took to report, what a victim was wearing, or how a victim responded are long outdated. They only tend to place insurmountable barriers to reporting sexual assault for future victims. Rape continues to be the most unreported crime according to the FBI. There are many reasons for this, one of which is that most victims know their perpetrators. They can be acquaintances, current or former spouses, boyfriends or girlfriends, family members, co-workers or neighbors. Last year alone, of all the sexual violence victims served by Crime Victims Council, 88% knew their perpetrators.

The dictionary defines "justice" as "being fair to." We often hear about criminal justice, yet we rarely hear about victim justice. In order for there to be justice, victims must be heard, they must be believed, and they must be supported. We all have the right to live without fear of being harmed, regardless of identity, social status, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or the color of our skin.

April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month and the first week of April is National Victims' Rights Week. We hope you can join Crime Victims Council as we honor and support the survivors of sexual violence and other crimes. We all have a role to play in making our community a better place and in restoring hope for victims of crime.

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