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Statement of National Crime Victim Law Institute re: Steubenville, Ohio Rape Case

Over the last week, as the trial of two rapists unfolded in Steubenville, the nation has been witness to media reports and public conversations that reveal the pervasiveness of archaic rape myths and cultural biases that promote victim blaming, discourage reporting of crime and accessing of services, and create public narratives about crime that fail to adequately hold perpetrators accountable.

In the aftermath of the verdict finding the two teenagers guilty of rape, this din has grown louder. In the past 36 hours, some news outlets have focused on the hardship endured by the offenders (lamenting the loss of their future careers as football players, and noting that their lives had been ruined); others have emphasized the victim's behavior on the night of the rape (focusing on the fact that she consumed alcohol, and suggesting that this diminishes her credibility or makes her culpable in her own victimization); while yet another news outlet chose, for inexplicable reasons, to release the victim's name, yet again contributing to a culture that tells survivors "you must choose between accessing justice and maintaining your privacy."

We all play a role in ensuring that justice is accessible, that survivors are supported, and that we move forward to build a better society. The media needs to play its part too.

We need to change this story.

We should bear witness to this survivor's strength in reporting and testifying. We should continue to support her – even anonymously – in the years ahead. We can do this by supporting the survivors who live next door and down the street from us; survivors who even as you read this are debating whether to report their rape.

Victims have legal rights. These rights are intended to ensure that victims are treated fairly and with dignity and respect; that they need not sacrifice everything when they choose to report a crime, and that when they do report a crime they will find themselves in a just system. If we make these rights meaningful we will change the story.

Founded in 2000, the [National Crime Victim Law Institute](http://www.NCVLI.org) is a national resource for crime victim lawyers and advocates to support the assertion and enforcement of victims' rights in criminal and civil processes. NCVLI continues to be the only national organization whose mission is focused on enforcement of victims' rights in the courts.