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## **STATEMENT: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **Cosby hearing affirms the need for change**

ENOLA, Pa. – Today, Kristen Houser, Chief Public Affairs Officer of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center and Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape released a statement on changing public perceptions of sexual assault:

“The reason for the proceedings in the Bill Cosby hearing at the Montgomery County, PA Courthouse the past two days is rooted in widespread problems encountered by victims of sexual assault and prosecutors across the country.

The American public—our collective pool of jurors nationwide—largely expect victims of rape to behave in ways that are absolutely different from how survivors of rape actually behave.

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center and the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape recognize that sexual assault perpetration and the tragic ways the crime impacts victims, families and communities is hard to look at, frightening to learn and distasteful to many.

But we have seen that looking away from these horrible acts and their painful aftermaths only results in the illusion of safety, and enables people who perpetrate these crimes to continue to inflict harm.”

NSVRC encourages communities to prioritize safety by recognizing these behaviors:

**Delayed reporting is normal:** Sexual abuse can cause intense feelings of shame, embarrassment, fear and humiliation. Victims often feel terrified of other people learning what has been done to them. That fear can keep victims silent for years after the abuse. When intoxicants are used as part of the assault, gaps in memory and fears of how others may react to learning about the use of drugs and alcohol can compound feelings of shame, self-blame and silence.

**Inconsistencies in statements are common after traumatic events:** Former Montgomery County District Attorney Bruce Castor, Jr. testified that inconsistencies between three statements made to three different police departments by the alleged victim were a contributing factor to his decision not to charge Bill Cosby with sexual assault crimes. He stated he believed a jury would question her credibility.

However, a large body of research on traumatic memory shows that the brain processes sensory information very differently during a traumatic event than during normal, non-threatening events. It is normal for victims of sexual assault, veterans of war, police who have been in the line of fire and victims of car accidents and others who have experienced traumatic events to:

- Have difficulty recalling details in a linear timeline
- Recall certain sensory information (smells, sounds, sights, etc.) but without context
- Have visual memories of parts of the event but not have words to communicate them due to trauma

As such, inconsistent statements are common and should be expected to be made by survivors of traumatic events, including sexual assault.

**All victims of sexual assault are entitled to use either or both the criminal and civil justice systems to seek justice.** It is important to remember that a District Attorney represents the interest of the state, and that a sexual assault victim is technically a witness to a crime committed against the state. The District Attorney is not charged nor bound to protect the interests of the victim. Civil attorneys are retained to protect the interests of the victim, and seeking their guidance and representation when the offender is someone of significant social, economic or political status is understandable and perhaps even wise. It is unfortunate that doing so makes others think the intent is simply to seek financial gain.

“Sadly, 11 years later, little has changed. Many sexual assault cases – both high profile and those with no media coverage – encounter the same barriers,” Houser continued.

“While people across our country are outraged by sexual assault when it impacts their families, communities and institutions, we struggle with incorporating facts about the crime into our collective knowledge, though doing so would help stop offenders.”

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center and the Pennsylvania Coalition of Rape encourage all to:

- Believe survivors – sexual assault is a widespread and serious crime
- Accept that delayed reports are normal – in fact, most victims never report at all
- Respect the right to access both criminal and civil justice remedies
- Learn how offenders use intoxicants strategically

Rape crisis centers throughout the country are available to provide support survivors and help victims recover from abuse. Visit [www.pcar.org](http://www.pcar.org) or [www.nsvrc.org](http://www.nsvrc.org) for more information or to find your local rape crisis center.

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