



**CONTACT:** Carol Tracy, Esq.  
(215) 928-5770  
ctracy@womenslawproject.org

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## **LANDMARK FINDING OF GENDER BIAS BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE IN NEW ORLEANS POLICE DEPARTMENT**

Philadelphia, PA—The Women’s Law Project commends the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice for its investigation of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) where it found major deficiencies and constitutional violations. Particularly significant was the landmark finding of widespread and pervasive gender bias in NOPD’s handling of crimes involving violence against women.

“To our knowledge, this is the first time that a police department has been investigated for gender bias,” said Carol E. Tracy, Executive Director of the Women’s Law Project. Ms. Tracy testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs last September about what she characterized as “the chronic and systemic failure” of police departments in many cities, including New Orleans, to properly investigate sex crimes, the victims of which are disproportionately female.

The Department of Justice Report mirrored Ms. Tracy’s testimony:

We find that NOPD has systematically misclassified large numbers of possible sexual assaults, resulting in a sweeping failure to properly investigate many potential cases of rape, attempted rape, and other sex crimes. We find that in situations where the Department pursues sexual assault complaints, the investigations are seriously deficient, marked by poor victim interviewing skills, missing or inadequate documentation, and minimal efforts to contact witnesses or interrogate suspects. The documentation we reviewed was replete with stereotypical assumptions and judgments about sex crimes and victims of sex crimes, including misguided commentary about the victims’ perceived credibility, sexual history, or delay in contacting the police.

*--Investigation of the New Orleans Police Department  
US Department of Justice. March 16, 2011. Page xi.*

<http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/spl/nopd.php>

The Report also found systemic deficiencies in NOPD's policies and practices in responding to domestic violence cases, while acknowledging recent improvements due in large part to the creation of the New Orleans Family Justice Center.

"This is a long overdue acknowledgement of gender bias in police practice and we hope police departments throughout the United States will begin self-audits of their practices," Carol Tracy added.

The Women's Law Project led a successful reform effort in Philadelphia a decade ago when *The Philadelphia Inquirer* uncovered similar practices in sexual assault and domestic violence cases in the Philadelphia Police Department.

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*About the Women's Law Project:*

*The Women's Law Project is a public interest law firm with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, PA. It works to eradicate gender bias through high-impact litigation, advocacy, and education.*

*The Women's Law Project  
125 South 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 300  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
215-928-9801  
[info@womenslawproject.org](mailto:info@womenslawproject.org)  
[www.womenslawproject.org](http://www.womenslawproject.org)*