

Women's Law Project Applauds Attorney General Holder on Changes to UCR Definition of Rape

January 6, 2012 - The Women's Law Project applauds Attorney General Holder announcement that the Uniform Crime Report's (UCR) definition of rape will be revised to provide a more comprehensive statistical reporting of rape in America. We also commend Vice President Biden and Director Susan Carbon of the Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women for their leadership in moving this issue forward.

The new definition will define rape as, "Penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim." The current definition only counts rape when it is vaginal-penile penetration by force, thereby excluding rape of men and penetration of other orifices with objects or other body parts.

"This change is about properly measuring the extent of rape in America. We now need to direct our attention to preventing rape and aggressively pursuing sexual predators, said Carol Tracy, Executive Director of the Women's Law Project.

This change is the result of a campaign initiated by the Women's Law Project a decade ago. On behalf of more than 80 state-based sexual assault coalitions and national organizations concerned with violence against women, the WLP wrote to FBI director, Robert Mueller, requesting a change in the definition of rape because the current definition, unchanged since 1929, was narrow, outmoded, steeped in gender-based stereotypes, and seriously understated the true incidence of serious sex crimes.

In September 2010, Carol Tracy testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs that the limited definition used in the UCR did not reflect current state criminal statutes and misled the public on the extent of sex crimes. In May 2011, the WLP renewed its request to the FBI's Criminal Justice Information System (CJIS) advisory process. A series of three meetings have taken place since August 2011 in which police chiefs, sheriffs and other high ranking law enforcement personnel have considered this request. Susan Carbon, the Director of Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women, spoke in support of updating the definition at all of these meetings.

We appreciate the thorough analysis and vetting process done by the FBI's advisory process. Police chiefs, sheriffs and other senior law enforcement officials throughout the country have been consulted and a clear consensus emerged that the change was appropriate," said Terry Fromson, Managing Attorney of the Women's Law Project.

The Women's Law Project, a Pennsylvania-based public interest law center, embarked upon this campaign during the reform effort in led in Philadelphia in response to an investigative series done by the Philadelphia Inquirer reporting that the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) failed to investigate thousands of sex crimes. The PPD developed a non-UCR code, "investigation of person" that placed these crimes in a bureaucratic limbo, removed from public and FBI scrutiny. This practice has been discontinued as part of a significant reform of sex crimes investigation in Philadelphia, including a yearly case review by the Women's Law Project and other advocacy organizations.

ABOUT THE WOMEN'S LAW PROJECT: The Women's Law Project is a non-profit women's legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The mission of the Women's Law Project is to create a more just and equitable society by advancing the rights and status of all women throughout their lives. To this end, the Women's Law Project engages in high-impact litigation, advocacy, and education. For more information, visit: www.womenslawproject.org, and follow us on Twitter @WomensLawProj.