

New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, Inc.
Address to the New Mexico Legislative Health and Human Services Committee
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Las Vegas, NM

Overview of the State of Sexual Violence in New Mexico

As Director of the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs for the last 23 years, I speak often and openly about sexual violence – both the outrage of it, and the hope for recovery and prevention. I'm not embarrassed to use sexual language, or to hear the most heart wrenching accounts from survivors and their families. However, when a neighbor came to my door in 2007 to describe the ongoing sexual abuse of his 6 year old by a family friend, I was shaken to my core. It started when the boy was 3. This boy came to my door every morning before school so he could read to me about bugs and snakes and lizards. Really. EVERY morning before 7am. I knew him for four years. That's every morning for four years. I knew the offender. A funny, very intelligent Ph.D. – a very hard working compassionate advocate for the poor. I, Director of the Coalition for 23 years, did not know. I was used to the weekly phone calls from angry, frustrated moms calling about their child's 'case' – about their disbelief that it would not get to court for a year or two. I was used to seeing our researchers annual numbers posted in her reports – 1,500 to 1,900 victims annually reporting. But THIS neighbor, THIS boy, THAT friend of the family. It was a gigantic reality check about how much more work still needs to happen.

What Does Sexual Violence Look Like In New Mexico:

An estimated 8,300 New Mexicans were raped in 2010.* That's 8,000 neighbors, friends, sisters, children who live near us, who live with us. In one year.

1,546 reported to law enforcement in 2010.

We know from this survey and national surveys that less than 17% of people who are sexually victimized report their assaults.

(*Through a rate established by a legislatively supported New Mexico Survey of Violence Victimization we are able to determine this estimate, Betty Caponera, Ph.D. 2007).

1 in 3 females and 1 in 6 males will be victims of sexual violence at some point in their lives. We all know someone who has been victimized. Our mothers, our sisters, our brothers, cousins, friends, spouses. Our fathers, our athletes, our students, our congregations, our neighbors. Truly, no one is immune to this epidemic.

67% of New Mexicans raped each year are children.

44% of the total number of New Mexicans raped each year are under 12

Nearly all children who are raped, are assaulted by someone known to the victim – 97%. Of this number, 38% were family (1. father, 2. Uncle or Cousin, 3. Stepfather).

For Adults, 87% of the rapes are perpetrated by a non-stranger. To illustrate this, David Lisak, Ph.D. studied 1,882 males in universities. 120 of these men had raped (6%) – for a total of 851 offenses. In 100% of these cases, the victims were known to the offender.

Only one was reported to the police, with no conviction. The good news: 1,762 men had NOT raped (93%).

22% are male, 78% female.

Numbers reflect a 10% increase from 2009 to 2010. We believe that this is a result of our sexual assault service providers increasing their efforts to make their services more accessible to victims.

The New Mexico Response

Twenty years ago when I testified in front of legislative committees in support of funding for Para Los Ninos, the only medical exam program specific to child sexual abuse, the majority of the legislators on the committees left the room. Many apologized later admitting that the very thought of child sexual abuse was too disturbing. Dr. Renee Ornelas, primary examiner, gave thoughtful testimony regarding her work – examining in excess of 500 children annually. She told accounts of three different children – each one causing committee members to tear up. The affect was profound – a legislator from a frontier community left to locate the members who had walked out and convincingly requested that the \$180,000 requested needed to be increased to \$300,000. It ultimately passed and continues to be a significant part of the Para Los Ninos budget.

New Mexico had three rape crisis centers (Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Las Cruces) and a total statewide budget of \$40,000 for prevention and awareness activities. The Coalition had \$60,000 to disburse to medical centers to perform examinations – those exams often performed by inexperienced interns.

Significant changes have since occurred:

Legislators now independently plan for experts in the sexual assault field to testify before their committees.

In 2003, one million dollars was approved by our legislature and has increased services to New Mexicans in a remarkable way.

- There are now seven rape crisis centers (Taos, Portales, Farmington, Las Cruces, Silver City, Santa Fe and Albuquerque).
- New Mexico increased the number of SANE units (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner) from 4 in 2000, to 11 in 2012. These units provide medical and forensic examinations of children and adults who have been sexually victimized. The Coalition provides 72 hours of training to new nurses.
- A New Mexico Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence Strategic Plan was created by a collaboration involving service providers and prevention experts from throughout the state. All seven rape crisis centers provide sexual violence prevention activities.

New Mexico now pays over \$700,000 to medical agencies for sexual abuse exams in what the Urban Institute from D.C. has determined to be one of the most progressive

states in compassionately responding to survivors of sexual violence. It is important to consider that in no other crime are victims expected to pay for the collection of evidence. And yet, until 1998, victims of sexual violence were expected to pay the bulk of their exam.

In these last nine years of receiving the legislatively supported funds over 11,000 SANE exams were performed, advocacy for 2,002 victims, 8,000 community education presentations to over 100,000 participants. These numbers only reflect the additional services made possible with the 1,000,000 – contracts which began in FY 04.

The Gaps

New Mexico has been unable to support new and emerging programs since our initial burst of growth following the million dollar infusion. We still have significant communities that do not provide crisis or SANE services. Our Coalition has been working with concerned citizens in several of our un-serviced communities including Gallup, Clayton, Raton, Dulce, Grants, Deming, and Jemez in an attempt to build collaboratives to address sexual violence. However, funds simply do not exist to fund these services.

All of our counties have access to community mental health centers. In the mid-80's each of these centers were given a sexual assault set-aside, allowing therapists to actively reach out and advocate to victims of sexual violence. They provided community education, assisted victims at the hospital, and connected them with a trained therapist. Due to mandatory regulations to provide services first to clients with long term mental illness, this set-aside was removed in the late 80's. This resulted in only a handful of centers that were able to still provide these services, all on a much more limited basis. This has created a remarkable need in areas where we do not have formal sexual assault services (SANE or rape crisis).

Prevention

The Penn State case has allowed for a greater breadth of discussion regarding youth who are sexually assaulted. We have to keep this momentum moving forward. We need every aspect of every community talking about sexual violence. The more we are able to discuss this topic openly, the less our citizens will be vulnerable to sexual violence. Removing secrecy, isolation, and lack of accessibility to services opens the door to preventing this epidemic.

A concerted effort is required if we are ever to be able to prevent sexual violence. The cost of sexual violence is estimated to be over \$150,000 per victim (criminal justice cost, therapy, loss of work, medical issues related to the assault, etc.). Incarceration costs for offenders average \$35,560 per year x an average sentence of 7 years = \$248,920 per offender. Annually, the funds for prevention of sexual violence in our state from all

sources (Children's Trust Fund grants specific to sexual violence, BHSD, and DOH) total less than \$300,000. That's less than the cost of one victim, one offender.

It is imperative that New Mexico improves on prevention. It is unbearable to imagine one more dad speaking to me about their family friend abusing their young son. Or one more young girl brought to a SANE unit in Portales, in Taos, in Albuquerque. Or one more woman not believed because she had a drink prior to her rape. Unbearable. Our legislature has shown that it is willing to hear the hard words, the hard cases, the hard numbers and put the funds into our collective response. Please support our statewide efforts to increase that response and create true prevention.

Gratitude

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee, we applaud you for including us in your agenda and thank those of you who are helping us address this gap in services. We ask every legislator on the committee who will be back in 2013 to commit to helping families in their communities by helping us increase the DOH budget to fill gaps in services.

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