



PRESS RELEASE

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Advocates Demand Improved Sexual Assault Protection Order Laws

In honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, advocates decry Washington Legislature's failure to pass bi-partisan Senate Bill 6151 in 2016, affirm commitment to pass this bill in 2017

In recognition of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, the King County Sexual Assault Resource Center (KCSARC), Legal Voice, the Washington State Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP), and YWCA Sexual Violence Legal Services renew their call for the Washington State Legislature to pass a bill to strengthen Sexual Assault Protection Orders next session. Senate Bill 6151, sponsored in this year's session by Senator Steve Litzow (R 41st), along with a companion house bill sponsored by Rep. Roger Goodman (D 45th), would have strengthened existing law to protect sexual assault survivors. Despite its broad bi-partisan support, the bill was derailed by unnecessary gun politics in the final days of the 2016 session.

Sexual Assault Protection Orders—or SAPOs—are civil orders that courts give to sexual assault victims to keep them safe. The order requires the perpetrator of sexual assault to stay away from the survivor and any place the survivor is, and to have no contact at all with the survivor. Today, judges are limited to issuing such orders for only two years, a time limit which is not always long enough to keep a victim safe.

“Victims have repeatedly shared with us how the limited duration of sexual assault protection orders impacts their safety” said Andrea Piper-Wentland of WCSAP. SB 6151 would have eliminated the two-year time limit and given judges the ability to enter a permanent order, bringing SAPOs in line with other Washington protection orders, including those for domestic violence, stalking, or harassment.

After passing the Senate unanimously, the bill moved to the House, where the National Rifle Association demanded a last minute amendment that would put sexual assault victims at risk. The amendment would have required a victim to come back to court for a new order every two years in cases where a judge required a perpetrator to surrender firearms.

“Strengthening the SAPO statute is a critical step to protect sexual assault victims by giving them the maximum protection necessary to keep them safe,” said Mary Ellen Stone, Executive Director of KCSARC. **“We don’t understand why some members of the Legislature want to treat the victims of sexual assault differently than they treat other crime victims.”**

This year’s Sexual Assault Awareness Month campaign focuses on ways that individuals, communities, and the private sector can help prevent sexual violence. Nearly [1 in 5 women](#) and 1 in 71 men are victims of sexual assault, and the impact of sexual violence is felt by entire communities. Everyone has a role in working to prevent sexual assault, and to support survivors to reclaim their lives.

As Riddhi Mukhopadhyay of YWCA’s Sexual Violence Legal Services program explains, “the Legislature missed a critical opportunity to protect sexual assault survivors and make our communities safer. We are committed to bringing this common-sense legislation back before the Legislature in 2017.”

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