

November 2, 2009

## Cleveland Rape Crisis Center Offers Empathy for Victims, Perspective for Community about Anthony Sowell Case

Dear Friends,

Halloween weekend came with the grim news that the bodies of six murdered women were found in the home of convicted rapist and registered sex offender Anthony Sowell in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood on Cleveland's east side. Advocates at Cleveland Rape Crisis Center join the community in expressing our empathy to the victims who survived and sympathy to the friends and families of those who have been lost. We recognize the tremendous suffering that so many are experiencing.

We are also asking many of the same questions that you are: Where was the public outcry when six women became missing from one inner-city neighborhood? Why weren't charges filed in 2008 when a victim reported that Sowell, a convicted rapist, raped her? Why did it take a month to investigate a second rape report against Sowell made on September 22, 2009? Where is the balance between a criminal's rights, a victim's rights and a community's need to get a violent criminal off the streets?

The answers are complex and we do not know all that has transpired. As more information becomes available, we ask you to consider the following observations. We hope these perspectives become part of the public dialogue surrounding this case:

**The Cleveland Police Department Sex Crimes Unit is under-resourced.**

A recent conversation with our peers in Milwaukee revealed that there are nearly 4 times as many detectives in Milwaukee's special victims unit as opposed to Cleveland's sex crimes unit, which also handles child abuse cases. We often listen to our clients' frustration over how time can lapse before a case can be investigated. We respect the work of our local detectives and share in their frustration at how overwhelming their

caseload is. We need more resources dedicated to services that respond to and address sexual assault as the needs are overwhelming.

**These crimes were targeted against one gender.**

**Violence against women is pervasive.**

Headlines about the Sowell case most often refer to the victims as “people,” which de-emphasizes that all of the victims are female. This is a blatant and targeted crime against a specific gender, women.

A review of mass-murder cases in Cleveland, particularly recent cases, shows that many are targeted at women and are committed by men that the victims know. Nearly all involve domestic violence and/or sexual violence – crimes that impact women far more proportionately than men. One in six women in the United States will be a victim of a completed or attempted rape in her lifetime. Most of these incidents are never reported to police and will not be in the local news.

In closing, Cleveland Rape Crisis Center is saddened by this weekend’s news and will work to stay abreast of new information and share insight and resources with the community.

Sincerely yours,

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