



The National Alliance to End Sexual Violence provides a critical voice for sexual assault advocates in Washington, D.C.

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Advocates Stand Against Narrow Rape Exemption in Abortion Legislation

More than fifty national and state anti-violence against women organizations joined the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence Wednesday in a statement asking Congress and the federal government to cease using the term “forcible rape” especially as it pertains to any exemption in abortion legislation. The groups also want states required to continue providing Medicaid coverage for abortions in cases of rape and incest.

“Rape is rape. The term “forcible rape” indicates a misunderstanding of both the nature and extent of sexual violence in our nation,” said Monika Johnson Hostler, president of the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence. Sexual violence occurs on a continuum of complex and difficult crimes having devastating impacts on victims. According to the United States Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics, only 31% of rapes are reported to law enforcement.¹ The term “forcible rape” is used in the Uniform Crime Report by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to report incidents of rape and is defined very narrowly excluding many forms of criminal sexual behavior.² “Using more restrictive language only limits the resources available to all rape victims,” Ms. Johnson Hostler added.

¹ <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/content/pub/press/rcp00pr.cfm>

² http://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2009/offenses/violent_crime/forcible_rape.html

“Every area of a victim’s life is affected by sexual violence whether it is a child sexually abused by a family member, a teenager coerced into sex by an older man, a college student drugged and assaulted at a party, or an adult raped by a stranger or by her ex-husband. Advocates at 1300 rape crisis centers across the United States bear witness to the trauma of sexual violence every day and see the torment caused by the loss of power and control over one’s body—one’s most intimate self—that is at the heart of sexual violence,” commented Terri Poore, Policy Chair of the National Alliance Against Sexual Violence.

Research shows that at least 1-5% of sexual assaults results in pregnancy.³ In 2008, the Supreme Court of California upheld that pregnancy resulting from rape constitutes great bodily injury.⁴ “Most of us can’t imagine what it would be like to face the pain of a pregnancy resulting from rape. The cornerstone of our work as advocates is supporting victims in regaining control over their bodies and lives by explaining all available options and supporting the victim’s decision about which option to choose. If after exploring all of her options, a victim of any form of sexual violence decides that she cannot go through with a pregnancy resulting from the crime, we should not add any hurdles or barriers to the process,” Ms. Johnson Hostler commented.

³ Holmes, M.M., et al. (1996). Rape-related pregnancy: Estimates and descriptive characteristics from a national sample of women. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 175(2): 320-25.

⁴ *People v. Cross*, 45 Cal. 4th 58 (2008).