

Kansas City Metro NOW
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TO: KS Senate Education Committee

FR: Amber Versola, Convener, Kansas City Metro NOW

RE: PROPONENT OF SB 91

My name is Amber Versola. I am the convener of Kansas City Metro NOW and a proponent of SB 91. I stand before you both as an advocate for the women who are faced with the aftermath of rape and also as a person who has escaped the nightmare that they are fighting to leave behind.

I was only 16 years old when 3 college football players decided to violate my body in the most intimate of ways. Seeking medical treatment after the attacks wasn't an easy decision. I knew how society views survivors of sexual assault, and I understood that I might not fit someone else's idea of what an "innocent rape victim" looks like. However, acquaintances that night – some of them survivors of rape themselves - convinced me to seek treatment.

That is how hours after the attack, I found myself in the emergency room standing over a sheet of paper. I undressed in front of a nurse and a female police officer. A doctor that I had known since childhood examined me. My body and clothes were treated as evidence. Perhaps one day, they would be examined so that someone else could decide if my nightmare was even plausible.

In that hospital room, I felt as if I had once again lost control of what happened to my body. Always a confident and strong young woman, I suddenly felt ashamed, fragile, and broken. The nurses warned me about sexually transmitted diseases and HIV, but I don't recall anyone ever discussing pregnancy. It was my mom who asked if there was anything I could take that would keep me from becoming pregnant. She was given a prescription for a form of emergency contraception. If it weren't for this, I probably wouldn't have realized that EC existed. My mom's thorough thought process and ability to advocate for my care proved to be empowering for me after my rapes.

Later, I would find my own voice.

My perpetrators didn't leave obvious scars or marks, but I was picking up the pieces of a soul torn asunder long after the physical pain of being raped was gone. At times, surviving their crime seemed impossible and there were many moments when I literally prayed to die.

However, I never gave up. Therapy was necessary to help me cope with the details that I wanted so desperately to forget, but activism served as my biggest survival mechanism. After my attacks, I wrote letters to every politician I thought could help me find justice. I reiterated my story to local newspapers and I reached out to other victims. Silence simply was not an option.

My voice allowed me to regain control of my crumbling world.

As I stand before you, I want to make something very clear: Those three men deeply hurt me, but they did not destroy me. I am strong and my voice does not waiver now as I ask for you to consider the staggering number of young women who are where I was over 14 years ago.

Many statistics show that one in four college aged women are victims of sexual assault. The KBI reported that in 2009, a person was raped every 7 hours and 48 minutes. Then consider that the US DOJ has estimated that only 55% of rapes are reported, and 5% of assaults result in pregnancies. However, as RAINN (Rape Abuse Incest National Network) points out, that number could actually be higher when you consider that the 5% figure only considers single instances of unprotected intercourse. Some women are re-victimized multiple times by their perpetrators. The number also doesn't include victims under 12 years old.

My advocacy may have begun as a sort of survival mechanism for myself, but it continues today for those young women who are the faces of these numbers. While I want to thank you for allowing me to share my story with you, I want to stress that this bill is not about rectifying what happened to me – it is about empowering the women who haven't yet realized the strength in their own story.

I am here because I believe they deserve to know that they are worth fighting for. They are worth the compassionate and empowering assistance that SB 91 offers, and they are certainly worth the minimal cost that it would take to provide them with the information they need to make an informed decision. These women were not able to control their rapists' actions, but they need to know that to some extent - they can control what happens to their body almost immediately after. Because of this, I respectfully ask for your support of SB 91.