

The Honorable John Barnes, Jr.
77 S. High St.
11th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

RE: H.B. 240

Dear Representative Barnes:

I am writing to you in support of your sponsorship of House Bill 240. The issue of sexual assault on campuses of higher learning is an epidemic. I believe your bill is a significant stride toward proper procedures and consequences at these institutions. I support your efforts to enforce protections for victims of sexual assault. I also urge you to consider an addition to your efforts.

This issue is personally significant for me. In June of 2009, during my freshman year at a local university, I was sexually assaulted in my dorm room. At the time of the incident, I did not understand what had happened to me. Like most people, I was raised to believe that sexual assault was something perpetrated by a stranger. Our media paints these perpetrators as monsters who jump out of bushes and attack passing joggers, or people who violently assault their victims. Neither of these scenarios were identical to my experience. I certainly felt immediate trauma, but because I could not identify my experience, I did not know what steps to take.

In the wake of the assault, I attempted to research what had happened. My university did not advertise assistance for victims of abuse or assault. I eventually found information online. I learned that sexual assault is most often committed by someone you know and trust. I learned that sexual assault is not always combined with physical or verbal abuse. Due to our brain's "fight or flight" response, many victims are rendered psychologically incapable of fighting back.

In the fall of 2009, I moved back into the dormitories of my university. I still had not found support, as my peers were prone to victim shaming and victim blaming. I found out on moving day that the man who assaulted me was assigned a room two doors down from mine. I tried to avoid contact with him, but being in such close quarters and sharing friends meant we inevitably had to meet. Friends who previously vowed to protect and defend me were socializing with him on a regular basis and refusing to broach the subject. I felt defeated. Before long, I was being sexually abused and assaulted by him on a regular basis. The lack of resources and support lead me to believe that I was to blame. Again, all of this took place in the dormitories.

Understandably, this abuse took a severe toll on my academics as well as my psychological well-being. On November 13, 2009, I attempted suicide in my dormitory. I was taken to a local hospital for treatment. The morning after, a member of the student affairs board at my university visited me in the hospital. She explained that campus policy prohibited suicide attempts and that I would have to undergo rigorous therapy and steps to be permitted back on campus.

The first step of this process was to meet with a campus psychiatrist and the assistant director of student affairs to assess my situation. During the visit, I made it explicitly clear that I was sexually assaulted on the institution's campus by another student. I named him and gave his exact dormitory

address. I was then assigned a counselor and a treatment plan with the hopes of returning to classes for the winter quarter of 2010. At no point in my counseling services or my meetings with student affairs was the violent crime committed against me addressed. Every time I attempted to bring it up, the focus was redirected to me. My behavior was to be modified, and only when I proved myself stable and worthy of returning to campus would I be allowed to do so. The perpetrator of my assault was left uninvestigated and uncharged.

Eventually the weight of my trauma took over. I was not able to keep up with classes or therapy. I struggled to take care of my basic needs. My therapist, a student and employee of my university, perpetuated the myth that I was to blame for my assault. I ended the 2009-2010 school year on academic probation. However, I was ultimately dismissed by the university for failing to comply with my treatment plan. When I attempted to appeal this decision, I was told repeatedly by student affairs that they were not concerned with the individual who had assaulted me. Their only concern was for their own liability in my struggle with mental illness.

At no point was I offered trauma-related services. No one sought to investigate the man who had assaulted me, or to properly document my claims. It would take years after leaving this university to seek proper treatment for what I now know is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I spent years struggling with homelessness and the inability to work. Thanks to the treatment I eventually received, I was finally healthy enough to return to college in the fall of 2016.

I am now 27-years-old. I am nearly ten years behind my peers on obtaining my degree and achieving my life goals. I have student loan debt for a degree I could not achieve. Essentially, I am paying for my assault. I have looked into Title IX and what filing a claim could do for my case. For starters, it has been too long for me to file. In the event I could pass an appeal to file a claim, the most likely consequence for the university I attended would be to demand a revised policy on sexual assault. Refusing to comply could result in a loss of federal funding, but it is unlikely the university would ignore the order, particularly due to financial issues in recent years. To be frank, neither result is enough for me. Due to the gross negligence of the university in question, I was incorrectly diagnosed, victim shamed, and ultimately driven out of the institution. As a young adult, I would have benefited from the support of my university where my peers had failed me. Instead, I grew to believe that the assault was my fault, and that I did not deserve the right to an education.

Therefore, Representative Barnes, I urge you to continue your fight to pass H.B. 240. Yet I also propose that you include an amendment that goes a step further. Simply asking these colleges and universities to revise their policies will not protect students like me. In the event these institutions fail to do their duty, what are the consequences? How will victims like myself be served justice? Of course, the university is not to blame for the assault itself. However, the way they handled my report of a violent crime is abhorrent. Filing a Title IX claim, as the law stands now, would not benefit me. I still have to pay for a degree I never received. I still have to pay for my assault, and I cannot regain those years lost.

I suggest strict financial repercussions for institutions who fail to properly record and investigate sexual assault and who fail to protect victims and deliver consequences for perpetrators. House Bill 240 seeks to make it mandatory for institutions of higher learning to outline clear consequences for perpetrators. There should also be clear procedures and consequences for the institutions themselves. This would

make sure that institutions that do not comply with Title IX policies would not fall through the cracks. A possible solution could be a strike system, in which an institution loses federal and state financial support if sexual assault reported are repeatedly mishandled.

I also urge you to consider reconciliation for the students who suffer due to this negligence. Formal apologies to the victim, the study body and the staff for failing to keep the campus safe should be mandatory. Your bill mentions resources for people who disclose these crimes. H.B. 240 should include a provision that mandates institutions provide these resources in the wake of their failure to adhere to policy, and at no expense to the student. Furthermore, in certain circumstances, students and faculty should have the right to seek damages for any unnecessary financial, emotional or physical suffering that were made worse by the institutions failure to comply. As Title IX and H.B. 240 currently stand, the repercussions listed do more to protect the institution as a business from further consequences or public disapproval than to protect the students they serve.

I ask that you consider this amendment, and I fervently support your case to protect the right to an education in a safe and empowering environment.

Sincerely,

Anonymous