

Letter from a Victim for the Interim Committee Hearing:

I was sexually harassed by a judge while working as an intern during law school. I can tell you that it was an absolutely horrible experience.

I reported the harassment, which went to the Judicial Commission. They interviewed me a month later and told me it could be months before I heard anything back. They requested I speak to no one about the investigation and warned me that doing so could result in a misdemeanor charge. Lastly, they told me that they did not represent me, but the People of Colorado. I was on my own. With that, I was released back into society—expected to go to school, carry on with my life, and keep my mouth shut.

I began to have terrible anxiety. I was in the dark with no one to give me updates or explain anything, no one able or willing to guide me. I was scared to tell anyone what was happening and risk a misdemeanor. I started having nightmares about the judge. The anxiety began to manifest in hideous ways. I was so worried that the Judge was going to ruin my career and dirty my reputation. I got to the point where I thought he could show up at my school or work and physically hurt me to keep me quiet. I would walk to the parking garage every day and have trouble breathing and would break into sweats. I felt like I was thrown to the wolves.

I continued to spiral as I waited in silence, not knowing if my claim was being taken seriously or an investigation was moving forward. The anxiety paired with something I had never before experienced, a deep depression. I began to hate law. I felt that it was all corrupt, that judges could do as they please with no consequences. and that as a woman, these things would continue to happen to me and no one would bat an eye. The judge that I had reported was still on the bench, and I had I heard nothing about what was happening. It became physically painful

to get out of bed and go to class. I started crying every night when I got home and seriously contemplated dropping out of school. Everything felt so hopeless, and I no longer felt like myself my friends approached me and begged me to go to therapy. I knew that I was not okay, but I did not have the energy to figure out how to enroll in therapy, or more importantly, how to pay for it.

Then I hit the lowest point in my life. I was driving home from a class and I remember being so hopeless and tired that I wanted it all to end. I let my hands hover off of the wheel for a few seconds and thought about how easy it would be to let go.

I had never had thoughts of killing myself or wanting to die before this. I spoke to someone at my university and told them a little bit of what was going on. This individual put me in contact with CAPE, an organization that acts as a resource coordinator for students who have been sexually harassed or assaulted. I finally had someone to talk to where I felt safe and heard. The CAPE officer organized everything to get me into therapy. It was quite literally a lifesaver.

However, the process with the Commission did not end there. Almost 6 months later, I got a call that they needed personal evidence from me. I was on Christmas break with my family, and I felt the anxiety hit again. Then more silence. Months later, they reached out and I was told that I needed to schedule a time to be deposed in the next couple of weeks right around the time of final exams. This involved my harasser sitting across a table from me as his attorney interrogated me. I was a witness and did not have rights as a victim. I was powerless to do anything, With finals looming, I had to scramble to get an attorney and find a way to pay for my own representation as a student living off of student loans.

When I reported, I was scared, but I was told it was the right thing to do. Now I feel failed by the system and I do not blame others for not reporting. The process has been re-traumatizing, to say the least. I have wanted to die, I have cried myself to sleep, I have been boiling with anger, I have been numb, scared, worried, and I have been all of the emotions that no victim should go through without support.

The reality is it is not that hard to do better and I have some suggestions.

First, there should be someone to explain the process in more detail at the beginning, maybe provide some written information, and help victims understand that they have the rights of a witness and that they should get their own representation.

Second, having someone as a point of contact. If a victim wants an update, or is confused about how the process works, someone they can feel safe and comfortable contacting to learn more.

Third, no one who reports should have to mentally suffer and have no resources to help. Having some sort of stipend for mental wellness in this process should be a given, and it should not be an added stress on the victim to figure out how to find a therapist, and how to pay for one.

Fourth, victims should have the right to an attorney at no cost. Whether this is paid for by the state, or at minimum attorneys volunteer pro bono, someone should coordinate this and cover expenses instead of throwing this responsibility and financial burden on a victim, who is typically a lower-level employee and does not have the same bucket of finances to dip into as a judge.

Next, possibly creating a hotline or a neutral person for victims to report to would be helpful. It can be terrifying to know that your harasser is 5 steps down the hall from the person you are supposed to report to.

Finally, little things need to be ensured too, such as making sure a victim is able to transfer or leave the job with the judge, change their phone number, etc.

If we care about this profession, if we want to foster young students into incredible lawyers, if we want courthouse employees or people standing before a judge to feel safe and not objectified, then we must do better. I am a first-generation law student; I have experienced a lot of hardship in my life. I have fought hard to be here. But this process almost made me give up and walk away from it all. I never want another person who is doing the right thing to have such a terrible experience. I don't want this profession to be seen as corrupt and a let-down. I ask you to help change it, to help victims who have already suffered feel like everything is going to be okay. We can and must do better.