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Second Story Women's Centre Statement on Sexual Assault

Second Story Women's Centre believes and stands with survivors of sexual assault.

It is a shameful fact that sexual violence is not only a common experience in our communities, but that we allow it to continue by denying the experiences of those who come forward, and by engaging in bad faith, victim-blaming arguments against them.

That shame does not belong to the victims of sexual violence, but to those who commit acts of sexual violence and a society that looks away and refuses to hold perpetrators of sexual violence to account for their actions. To be clear: Sexual violence is caused solely by the decisions and actions of the perpetrator, not the victim's dress, conduct, lifestyle, location, level of intoxication, relationship to the perpetrator, prior sexual history or prior consent.

Second Story Women's Centre condemns the harassment that survivors of sexual assault routinely receive when they speak publicly about being assaulted. It is wholly unfair that when survivors of sexual violence disclose their experiences, they do so knowing that they will be further harmed by the process of seeking accountability for what has been done to them and their attempt to prevent others from being assaulted. To those that publicly criticize and question the motives of people who come forward about being assaulted, we remind you that the survivors of sexual violence in your community are watching and taking note of your actions and reactions. The mistreatment of survivors who disclose is not only undeserved, but also serves to intimidate other victims of sexual violence from coming forward, which continues the cycle of rape culture in our communities. **Did you know only 5% of victims report being sexually assaulted to police?** An even smaller percentage of cases actually move forward to conviction. We need to do better.

Second Story Women's Centre is concerned when people use their position of power to gain unconsenting access to others' bodies. All employers have a responsibility to make their workplaces safe, for both patrons and staff.

We would also like to take this opportunity to remind our community-members and our new provincial government leaders, that funding for sexual assault support services is dismal and we do not have a much needed sexual violence strategy. As a result, our Women's Centres and sexual assault support service providers have been overwhelmed by demand, and struggle to provide for the needs of survivors in our communities. In March 2021, the Province of Nova Scotia announced that a **\$2.3 million** increase for therapy supports for survivors of sexual assault would be available. Six months later, we are still waiting to learn how this will be rolled out. **This is unacceptable.**

Finally, to anyone who has experienced sexual violence or is finding themselves triggered by any recent news coverage: resource and navigation support is available by calling Second Story at 902-640-3044 or **info@secondstory.ca**. What happened to you was not your fault, and you deserve to be safe, supported and well. We stand with you.

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