



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

**Letitia James**

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Contact: Anna Brower, 917-671-8504, [abrower@pubadvocate.nyc.gov](mailto:abrower@pubadvocate.nyc.gov)

Press Release

## **PA James Calls for Increased Funding for Rape Crisis Centers, Rape Prevention Programs, and SAFE Centers of Excellence**

*Recent data shows that rape and sexual assault crimes in New York have increased*

(New York, NY) — In light of recent reports that rape and sexual assault crimes are on the rise in New York City, Public Advocate Letitia James called for several measures to combat and respond to these crimes, including increased funding for rape crisis centers, restored funding for rape prevention programs, and additional funding to establish SAFE Centers of Excellence in the Bronx and Brooklyn, which are the two most under-served boroughs for such services. Following the brutal rape of a 12-year-old girl in the Bronx and last week's revelation of two teenage girls in Brooklyn who were raped and sex trafficked in their own neighborhood, the Public Advocate is also calling for increased vigilance in the community to get the perpetrators off the streets and for reporting of all instances of sexual assault to the authorities.

"The rise in sex crimes in our city is unacceptable," said **Public Advocate Letitia James**. "Last week's brutal attack on a 12-year-old girl is one horrifically public instance of the kinds of sex crimes that are taking place every day. Last year, there were over 1,500 reported rapes to the NYPD - and it is estimated that 60 percent of sexual assault crimes go unreported. We must dedicate every resource we can to prevention and response, which is why I am calling for increased funding for rape crisis centers, restoration of funds for rape prevention programs, funding to create SAFE Centers of Excellence in the Bronx and Brooklyn, and increased vigilance from every New Yorker to report sexual assault in their communities."

Over the last five years, reported rape crimes have increased in New York City. And while 1,537 rapes were reported to the New York Police Department in 2014, it is estimated that as many as 50,000 rapes may be occurring each year in New York City. Misdemeanor sexual assault crimes are also on the rise. According to CompStat, as of the week ending February 22, 2015, these crimes were up 9.6 percent. Additionally, women who are poor and/or persons of color

are disproportionately victims of sexual assault – nearly 40 percent of Black women and almost 20 percent of Latinas.

“The Alliance supports the Public Advocate’s efforts to end sexual assault in New York City. We are particularly delighted to see the Public Advocate’s focus on expanding resources for all survivors of sexual assault including college/university students. Sexual assault has been a hidden and unjust situation for many years that must be addressed,” said **Mary Haviland, Esq., Executive Director, the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault**. “The Alliance is in support of the legislative attempts to put best practices in place and applauds the Public Advocate’s efforts to adequately fund rape crisis services that can provide confidential counseling services and help build capacity for colleges and universities.”

“Public Advocate Letitia James’ leadership and her call for additional resources will assist all victims of sexual violence and ensure that those who are being abused get the critical services that they need and deserve. Rape and sexual assault are brutal tactics that domestic violence batterers and human traffickers often use to intimidate and control their victims,” said **Judy Harris Kluger, Executive Director of Sanctuary for Families**, a leading service provider and advocate for survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking and related forms of gender violence.

“In 1982, Kingsbridge Heights Community Center was asked by the Bronx Rape Crisis program to start a program due to a lack of services for child rape survivors and our expertise in understanding that all survivors heal differently,” said **Giselle Melendez-Susca, Executive Director at KHCC**. “Today, our Child Sexual Abuse program is the only one in the Bronx providing free, long-term counseling to hundreds of survivors and their families. As part of the National Movement to End Child Sexual Abuse, we also do work in advocacy, legislation and policy change to end this silent epidemic.”

The Public Advocate is calling for the following measures:

1. **Include an additional \$3 million in State funding for rape prevention programs in the 2015-16 Budget.** On April 1, 2015, state funding for prevention programs is set to expire unless the governor and legislature act. The reduction of \$1,495,743, a 60% decrease in prevention funding would affect vital sexual assault prevention programs, which is the only truly proactive way to prevent sexual assaults.
2. **Increase State Funding for Rape Crisis Services by \$2.8 million.** As of April, 2015 Rape Crisis Programs will receive 42% less funding for sexual assault victim services, at a time when cases have gone up by 65% over the last two years. This will result in the devastating reduction

of necessary services from hotlines to individual counseling. It will also necessitate laying off at least two dozen experienced service providers, meaning that more than 2,000 victims will go without services.

3. **Add a total of \$900,000 in city funding to support the creation of SAFE Centers of Excellence in the Bronx and Brooklyn, two most under-resourced boroughs** in New York City. New York State certified Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner programs provide victims with specialized support, care and equipment necessary to conduct examinations and provide ongoing support services for survivors.

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