

Statement from T. M.

Even though what happened to me took place a year ago, it still frightens and saddens me to think about to this day. The assault lasted five minutes, but I feel as if it has changed my life forever. It wasn't just about recovering from the attack – though that was traumatic enough – it has also been about dealing with the aftermath: the bullying, the feeling empty inside, and being punished by my school.

What has hurt the most is that I have suffered for something I didn't do. My school punished *me* and made it seem like the attack was somehow my fault. For a long time, I thought maybe it was --“I shouldn't have told anyone.” “I should have known better.” “I shouldn't have been so naïve.” These things ran constantly through my mind.

I came to realize that it wasn't my fault. It is never the victims' fault and no one should be made to feel that way. It doesn't matter where you are, what you are wearing, or how you look. Everyone should understand that 'no' means 'no.'

But even as I came to understand that, most of my friends did not. I lost all of my friends, and I was bullied by them, too. That really hurt.

Things were very tough and what made it worse was that I had to stay at home while everyone else was at school. When I was able to go back to school, people stared and pointed as I walked down the halls and said horrible things. It was sad. I just wanted help, but I got just the opposite.

I really wish my school would have helped me instead of looking out for itself. The school took advantage of me, and that wasn't fair. They forced me, and my family, into a hearing where I had to “testify” about why I broke a school rule.

The school should have pulled my attacker out of school and put him somewhere else, far away from me.

My school has failed me, and I do not feel like I can ever forgive them. Now, because of what they did, my family and I have to move out of the county so we don't have to deal with being here anymore. It just isn't fair. While I've felt like I cannot trust or rely on anyone, I have also learned to be a stronger person and that, if nobody else is there for you, you learn to be there for yourself.

What the school, and my attacker, did was wrong. I hope no other boy or girl has to go through what I have been through.