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**CONTACT**

Abby Ross  
Office of Senator Lori Berman  
561-292-6014

Nic Hessing  
Office of Representative Robin Bartleman  
[Nicholas.Hessing@myfloridahouse.gov](mailto:Nicholas.Hessing@myfloridahouse.gov)  
954-592-2370

**Senator Lori Berman and Representative Robin Bartleman  
File Legislation to Protect Victims' Privacy and Anonymity**

**TALLAHASSEE, Fla.** - "My name is Karen Hansen, and I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, college rape, and domestic violence...The stigma, the embarrassment, and the judgmental interactions I experienced suppressed my voice. I was never able to achieve justice through the criminal or civil system..." (full story below).

Thus begins the story of a life-long victim of sexual assault, who not only blamed herself for the violence she had endured, but hid the deep emotional scars out of shame and embarrassment.

To end the victimization and stem the reluctance to report sexual violence out of fear, state **Senator Lori Berman (D-Delray Beach)** and **Representative Robin Bartleman (D-Weston)** have filed [SB 1044/HB 767](#), ensuring that any victim of such a horrendous act would have to give express written consent to any person or entity in possession of the victim's information in order for their name to be disclosed in any public proceeding.

The measure is designed to plug a gaping loophole in current state law that allows the names or identifying information of survivors who report such crimes to others, including employers and schools, to be disclosed, including information or records created for a potential case against the perpetrator. Perpetrators or other third parties who may be responsible can also threaten public exposure of the survivor's identity in order to discourage reporting of the crimes to law enforcement, school administrators, employers and others.

"We know that many sex criminals victimize numerous others unless stopped by law enforcement," said **Senator Berman**. "But we also know that many victims, like Karen, are reluctant to come forward out of fear for their attacker, or feeling that somehow they were to blame for the assault. This bill helps prevent breaches in their security so that justice can prevail for these victims. Survivors deserve our support and encouragement and that begins by assuring them of their privacy."

"Once a sexual assault victim finds his or her strength to report the crime, it is imperative

that the State does its part to protect the victim,” said **Representative Bartleman**. “**HB 767** will protect the anonymity of the survivor. They should NOT be re-traumatized and threatened with public exposure for reporting a crime of this nature.”

The Florida Council Against Sexual Violence, Palm Beach County Victims’ Services and the Sexual Assault Response Team are also all in support of this legislation. “As attorneys who work solely with victims of sexual violence, the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence’s legal team sees first-hand the toll that releases of information, whether intentional or negligent, have on victims’ mental and physical states and, consequently, their willingness to access supportive and trauma-informed services,” said **Theresa Prichard, Associate Director and General Counsel of the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence**. “Victims’ rights to privacy are essential to their healing and our team advocates for clients in ensuring these rights are honored. **SB 1044** provides specific protection to survivors’ privacy and safety, helping to alleviate re-traumatization, and enshrining a victim’s right to control what information they release and to whom.”

The bill has been filed for the 2021 legislative session, which begins Tuesday, March 2, 2021.

*\*Please call Florida’s Statewide Abuse Hotline at 1-888-956-7273 if you or a loved one ever needs to reach out for help.\**

Full story by Karen Hansen:

“My name is Karen Hansen, and I am a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, college rape (followed by pregnancy, resulting in the birth of my daughter) and domestic violence. When I was 9 months pregnant with my son, and my daughter was twelve, she was sexually assaulted by my (then) husband, which led to my divorce and the ensuing domestic violence we endured. With this as my personal history, I intimately understand the nuances of these life-changing events. My rape occurred in 1994, before “acquaintance rape” was a known term. I had been out drinking with girlfriends and thought I was being responsible at the end of the night, by having one friend’s date walk me home. He followed me into my home and had sex with me against my will. Afterward, I curled up into the fetal position and cried myself to sleep, hoping it was just a nightmare. Through pregnancy, and graduation with a one-year-old, I never told anyone about that night. I blamed myself until nearly ten years later, when I had the epiphany that he should carry that shame, not me. The stigma, the embarrassment, and the judgmental interactions I experienced suppressed my voice. I was never able to achieve justice through the criminal or civil system and bore the financial and emotional burden of single motherhood on my own. Anyone who has been sexually violated should have the right to own their story as well, without being involuntarily thrust into the public eye or targeted by individuals or systems who focus on shame and intimidation tactics to impose silence. At the age of 22, my daughter was able to receive justice through the civil court system under the name Jane Doe No. 64, which allowed her the anonymity and freedom to pursue the healing process. This healing can take decades, and it is only until the right amount of personal strength can be found, that a victim or survivor should choose to publicly share their story or name, at their own discretion. This legislation can be life-saving during unimaginable times, and I ask personally, on behalf of all victims and survivors, that you pass bill this without delay.”

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