

United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Hearing on the Survivors' Bill of Rights: Implementation and Next Steps

Prepared Testimony of Terry Crews
Actor and Advocate
June 26, 2018

Chairman Grassley, Ranking Member Feinstein, and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for inviting me to testify on the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights today. My name is Terry Crews. I am an actor, author, former athlete, advocate, and a survivor of a sexual assault.

This past year, we have seen powerful men in Hollywood and elsewhere finally held accountable for sexual harassment and assault. We also saw the backlash survivors faced after coming forward. I wanted these survivors to know that I believed them, I supported them, and that this happened to me too.

This encouraged me to come forward with my own experience, and reflect on the cult of "toxic masculinity" that exists in our society.

As a child I watched as my father violently abused my mother, using his power and authority to dominate her. All I could think was how I wanted to protect her. How, if I get strong, I can protect her from this living nightmare.

As I grew up, this thought transformed the type of man I became. I swore I would never be like my father and yet I believed, to my core, that as a man, I was more valuable in this world. As a protector and symbol of strength, I was more worthy. That women were beneath me.

I used images of women's body and pornography at my disposal, validating my need for control. I often cut women short of sharing personal details of their lives so they would seem less human, less real. As a man, I was taught my entire life that I must control the world. So, I used power, influence and control to dominate every situation: from the football field to the film set, even in my own home with my wife and children.

Then, in 2016 while at a party with my wife, I was sexually assaulted by a successful Hollywood agent. The assault lasted only minutes, but what he was effectively telling me while he held my genitals in his hand was that he held the power. That he was in control.

This is how toxic masculinity permeates culture. As I shared my story, I was told over and over that this was not abuse. This was just a joke. This was just horseplay. But I can say one man's horseplay is another man's humiliation. And I chose to tell my story and share my experience to stand in solidarity with millions of other survivors around the world. That I know how hard it is to come forward, I know the shame associated with the assault. It happened to me.

I'm not a small or insecure man, but in that moment, and in this time following, I've never felt more emasculated. As I watched women and colleagues in my industry come forward to share their #MeToo stories, this shame washed over me again and I knew I needed to act. I am honored to use my platform and story to help create additional civil rights protections for survivors across the nation under the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights.

Which is why the Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights is a critical bill that must be enacted in all fifty states. This bill gives survivors the right to a fully government subsidized rape kit to alleviate the financial burden of seeking justice. It gives survivors the right to receive information, including access to police reports, rape kit results, and access to sexual assault counselors. And by requiring that rape kits and forensic DNA evidence be retained for the duration of the statute of limitations, this bill gives survivors the right to have time to distance themselves from the immediate trauma before making the difficult decision to report the assault to law enforcement.

This is why I sit here today with Amanda Nguyen and the Rise team. Every man, woman and child deserves to be seen as equal under the law. The Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights does just that by recognizing survivors' basic civil rights. While we can call attention to a culture of toxic masculinity and the need to disrupt power dynamics, this bill creates long-term change and gives power and control back to survivors. All survivors must be protected and this bill must be enacted in all fifty states. Thank you.