



*Hearing before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs
Dirksen Senate Office Building*

***Rape in the United States:
The Chronic Failure to Report and Investigate Rape Cases
September 14, 2010***

Testimony from Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey
Philadelphia Police Department

Good Morning Chairman Specter, Senator Graham, and invited speakers and guests. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to discuss this critically important issue. Having had 42 years in law enforcement, I have witnessed many important changes in how rape and sexual assault are reported and handled by police departments in three cities: first in Chicago for 30 years, then as Chief of the Metropolitan Police Department here in Washington, DC, for nine years, and now as Police Commissioner in Philadelphia. Additionally, I currently serve as the President of the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), the First Vice President of Major Cities Chiefs and as a member of the executive committee of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

I'd like to begin by thanking a trusted colleague, tireless advocate and friend in Carol Tracy, who testified before me and summarized the incidents in Philadelphia in 1999 that led to dramatic changes in the Department. I firmly believe that partnerships between law enforcement agencies and our social service, prevention and victim advocacy counterparts are absolutely essential in addressing some of the most pressing issues that confront us.

I will be brief in this testimony, and share with you the most relevant lessons learned from our history in the Philadelphia Police Department of how rape has been reported and investigated. The deliberate downgrading of rape cases in the Philadelphia Police Department in the late 1990s, brought to light by the excellent investigative work of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, exposed a widespread hidden practice. There was no one person, or unit responsible; **it was a pervasive and systemic failure**. Consequently, it took a comprehensive and relentless approach to address this failure. Under then Police Commissioner, John Timoney, many important corrective actions were taken at all levels: from training, report writing and interviewing, to coding and follow-up investigation. It also required changing leadership, adjusting staffing levels, accepting oversight and establishing partnerships with advocacy groups.

The Department has had the same commander of the now Special Victims Unit (SVU), since the year 2000, at which time a number of seasoned investigators were also transferred into the unit to increase our staffing levels. Our partners have also remained in their positions in the advocacy groups. Carol Tracy has been with the Women's Law Project since these changes were implemented, and once a year, she and her peers from other organizations, come to the SVU office and pore over between 300 to 400 cases selected at random. They have complete access to our files and our personnel. This is just the formal component of their annual review, but on a daily basis, these organizations are in constant communication with police personnel from SVU. They have established a long-term relationship, one which has built trust and confidence in what was a broken system. I credit all the personnel in SVU and our advocacy groups for their persistence and their dedication to

their jobs, and to the thousands of people they've helped deal with such painful acts of violence and trauma. I cannot overstate the importance of this collaboration in charting a new course of direction in how rape was, and is reported and investigated by our Department.

The Philadelphia Police Department put measures into place that thus far have been helpful in re-establishing trust, and promoting a culture that treats victims of rape with dignity and respect. There will always be ways in which we can better the process, and we are committed to continuous improvement as a core principle for how we will move into the future. It's now been over ten years since these practices have been exposed, and seemingly, we have sustained these changes for the better. Sustainability cannot be overlooked as we discuss implementing long-term procedural and cultural changes.

Fostering collaboration amongst governmental organizations, police departments, courts, and advocacy and prevention groups is critical in ensuring that we work with victims of rape and sexual assault in a manner that is compassionate, and under a process that is transparent. We must all be advocates for anyone who has been impacted by this kind of violence. If there are lessons to be learned from our Department, I would urge others to focus on this aspect of how we report and investigate rape and sexual assault. Don't do it alone - Invite your stakeholders to be a part of this process, and work together in treating rape and sexual assault from a holistic perspective. Our partnerships have strengthened every part of the process, from reporting each case of sexual assault, irrespective of the circumstances, to a thorough investigation by well-trained specialized detectives, and finally to working with our medical and mental health providers in minimizing the trauma experienced by victims of the heinous crime.

A crisis is often a catalyst for real and systemic change - such was the case for Philadelphia. Police departments can also learn from each other, and organizations like PERF can facilitate that transfer of knowledge. I am pleased to announce today, as the President of PERF, that we will convene an executive session in early 2011 for police leaders, medical and mental health professionals, and advocacy groups to discuss the current state of sexual assault reporting and investigations. Based on the results of this session, we will make recommendations on how police agencies can partner with their social service and advocacy colleagues, and identify best practices in the investigative process.

Thank you for your time here today, and for convening this hearing on an issue that impacts us all. I am happy to answer any questions that the Committee may have.