



The Awareness Center, Inc.

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Bullying, Intimidation, Extortion Attempts Advocating for Survivors of Sexual Violence

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I don't often speak out publicly about the daily workings of running the only international Jewish coalition against sexual violence. Yet the time has come to bring certain aspects of our work out in the open.

I want to make a point to mention that what ever it is that those who volunteer for The Awareness Center endure, is minor in comparison to what the survivors who contact our organization are forced to deal with on a daily basis.

It is also vitally important to mention that the process of bullying, intimidating and extortion of both survivors and victim advocates is not limited to those in Jewish communities. These sorts of behaviors are conducted by individuals of all faiths -- within their own communities.

As many of you know, The Awareness Center has extremely limited funding and is run purely by volunteers. One of the toughest decisions our executive board had to make was to create a waiting list to assist those who contact us.

Until we have secured enough funding, our efforts are limited. We can only do our best to meet the demand. I want to remind you that The Awareness Center desperately needs your time, energy and financial support.

Those who volunteer for The Awareness Center are some of the most dedicated and courageous individuals I have ever met. I want everyone to realize that prior to volunteering, they are warned about the dangers they will face being associated with our not-for-profit organization. The fact is that each volunteer is putting themselves, their family members and friends at risk of being bullied, intimidated and subjected to other forms of extortion.

Why? Because they are dedicated to putting an end to sexual violence.

Our volunteers understand that changing the way our communities handle allegations of sexual violence NEEDS to be changed immediately. They understand that our rabbis and other community leaders do not have the education or experience to deal with survivors or sex offenders. I hate to say that it appears the majority of our rabbis and community leaders have never taken issues regarding sexual violence seriously.

The Awareness Center is the international Jewish Coalition Against Sexual Abuse/Assault. We are a victim advocacy organization. We offer information and resources on topics relating to sexual violence from a Jewish perspective. We offer educational programming and a speakers bureau. We are there for those who have been victimized. This includes

family members of both survivors and offenders (alleged and convicted).

The Awareness Center maintains a list of alleged and convicted sex offenders as a small part of our web page. Our list has been seen as controversial, yet is also something that is necessary as an attempt to protect innocent individual from becoming the next victim. Please be aware that many other advocacy organizations (of various faith groups) are doing exactly the same thing we are.

In the past, The Awareness Center had several situations in which a sex offender from one state moved to another; and then sought a position working in a school, camp or child care facility. Because the individual was posted on our site, we were able to prevent another possible child from being victimized.

The purpose of our list of Rabbis, Cantors and Other Trusted Officials is to protect innocent individuals in our communities from becoming the next victim of an alleged or convicted sexual predator. Past history has shown us, that our community leaders have done little to protect us adequately.

The past tradition in dealing with cases of sexual violence has been to "run a sex offender out of town." With the belief the individual would no longer be a threat to the immediate community, yet there often there was NO warnings system in place to the new community.

The solution in dealing with sex offenders, is NOT to run someone out of town. The answer is for us as a community to insure that offenders are in treatment with qualified, licensed professionals, and that they are monitored not to have access to those who they have a tendency to offend.

I once read some where that "it takes a village to raise a child." The same is true for a sex offender. We need to devise methods to address these serious problems. There are NO easy answers.

Another long time tradition has been to also "chase out" not only those who offend, but also those who have spoken out against an offender; especially if the alleged or convicted offender is someone who has some sort of public standing in the community. This "chasing out" process includes: no longer allowing children to attend Jewish schools (yeshivas), individuals or families no longer welcome at Shabbos tables, individuals losing their jobs, and or no longer being allowed to pray (daven) in their synagogue, etc.

I have heard of cases where background checks were done

on the survivor, their family members and or friends. As we all know everyone has something about themselves they would not want to be made public. We have all made mistakes.

Information would be gathered, and then a warning would be made, that if the survivor didn't drop the case, either the survivor or someone they love would be "exposed."

Would you be shocked to hear me say that these intimidation methods NEED to cease IMMEDIATELY!

Should any of us be surprised that those who volunteer for The Awareness Center also face these forms of harassment.

Our organization is dedicated to representing those who have been sexually victimized. We are speaking out against the way our rabbis and communities have been handling allegations in the past, and because we are pressuring them to make changes. We are also doing what we can to have the needs of those who have been victimized met. We are dedicated to helping them become much more than just "survivors."

Would you be shocked to learn that there have been times that various individuals offered to fund our organization, only if we would take various convicted individuals off of our site? Needless to say, we did not accept the terms of the funding. We do have policies in place regarding individuals being removed (<http://www.theawarenesscenter.org/policies.html>).

Despite rumors, the majority of cases The Awareness Center works with never end up on our web page of alleged and convicted offenders. Our goal is NOT to "get someone." Our goal is to help survivors find the resources that are needed, educate our communities and our leaders on the issues surrounding sexual violence (including the needs of both those who have been victimized and those who offend), and do our best to prevent one more person from being victimized.

Remember if you are in a minyan with 10 men, statistically two of them will be survivors of childhood sexual abuse. If you are in a room with 10 women, three will also most likely be survivors.

The Awareness Center already has more survivors than what we can handle. We need to do what we can to prevent anyone else from becoming the next victim of a sex crimes. We desperately need your help securing grants. If you have experience grant writing, please volunteer your time.