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## NSVRC STATEMENT: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

# In response to WaPo Fact Checker: One rape is too many

HARRISBURG, PA – Sexual violence is complex and hard to talk about, but the fact is that sexual violence is an issue of epidemic proportions that impacts all of society. The February 12 column by Glenn Kessler in the Washington Post questions the accuracy of statistics about sexual assault, second-guesses research design and respondent ability to understand plainly worded questions, and ultimately infers that drug- or alcohol-facilitated sexual assaults are not legitimate.

Sexual violence occurs when a person chooses to exploit a vulnerability they see in another person — and this criminal behavior can take place whether or not alcohol or drugs are involved.

In fact, offenders use drugs and alcohol strategically when it comes to sexual assault: they know that someone who is severely intoxicated is often unable to stay conscious, have control of their bodies or surroundings and are likely to have gaps in memory; perpetrators use drugs or alcohol to lower their own inhibitions; and they rely on public opinion to not take reports of sexual assault seriously if the victim and/or offender were intoxicated. The offenders count on “us” to excuse their actions.

This offender strategy happens both on and off college campuses, and calling this common reality into question, or questioning statistics that have been consistently in the same range for two decades, distracts from efforts to prevent and respond to the very real and all-too-pervasive problem of sexual violence.

One rape is too many. The experience of sexual assault can be devastating, often derailing the pursuit of education, disrupting relationships, destroying a survivor’s sense of safety in the world and creating doubts about self-worth and a survivor’s ability to determine whom they can and cannot trust. Sexual assault damages campus communities and our society as a whole.

Statistics represent the stories of the countless survivors of sexual violence, many of whom were afraid to tell their friends, go to the police or confide in their families; their fears are largely rooted in the knowledge that their stories and actions—and thus their pain—are likely to be doubted by a culture that needs to do much better in listening to survivors. We appreciate the President of the United States publicly prioritizing sexual assault prevention and urging others to do the same.

The NSVRC knows that traumatizing acts of sexual violence are widespread and affect all genders, races, ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. The NSVRC is committed to sexual violence prevention, providing research-based resources and fostering collaboration at the local, state and national-level. For positive change to occur, it is imperative that we develop a full and accurate understanding of the sexual violence epidemic, both on and off college campuses. We remain steadfastly committed to improving the quality of public health services and support to victims and their families, and to supporting communities in encouraging victims to seek help and report these crimes.