



Compulsory testifying for victims of sexual and domestic violence is Antithetical to Victim-Centred Justice

We are very concerned about the [recent article](#) by Amanda Marcotte in Slate which approves of the arrest as a material witness of a victim of sexual violence in Washington. The specifics of the case Marcotte references are [here](#), however, rather than addressing that case in particular we want to make our position clear on forcing victims to testify since similar laws exist in the UK as well.

As an organisation, we do not support any laws or policies which require or force victims to testify. We believe that the justice system must ensure that the rights and physical and mental health of victims are of primary concern. This means that the decision to testify must be that of the victim without coercion, threats of incarceration, or incarceration itself. We do support laws which allow for prosecutions based on witness testimony of others, such as in the case of domestic violence wherein the police can press charges without the victims participation. We do not support laws which put the needs and safety of victims secondary to prosecution or push for prosecutions without acknowledging the possible consequences for the victim long-term.

We are very concerned by the inherent victim blaming in Marcotte's piece:

The sad, unavoidable truth is that we have to decide what's more important to us: putting abusive men in jail or letting their victims opt out of cooperating with the prosecution as they see fit. Always erring on the side of victim sensitivity means putting some very bad men back out on the streets, where they will likely attack someone else. If that's the price that you feel is worth paying, OK, but it's also understandable that prosecutors might try to do everything within their power to convict a guy who likes tying women to chairs and assaulting them.

The only person responsible for sexual and/ or domestic violence is the perpetrator. It is NEVER the victim's fault and insinuating that a victim is responsible for a rapist committing further crimes is reprehensible. It is not the responsibility of women to keep other women safe & to suggest that a victim *must* testify in order to protect other women is the insidious type of victim blaming that our organisation campaigns against. Complicity in this type of victim blaming is common, but not unavoidable. If we want victims to have faith in the system, their needs must be prioritised and that includes them making the choice whether or not they want to testify. It does not involve blaming them for the actions of the perpetrator or criminalising them for not being in a position to testify.