**Safe Alliance Cautions Against Re-Victimizing Victims of Sexual Assault and Rape**

**Charlotte** – Safe Alliance has been watching with great interest – and concern -- the aftermath of the Steubenville, Ohio rape case that has generated international attention, in particular due to social media posts of the victim in tweets, texts, photos and videos that traveled around the globe depicting evidence of the rape.

The facts are: Two teenage football players were convicted of raping a 16-year old girl. The boys, ages 16 & 17, have been sentenced to juvenile detention facilities and could be held until they are 21. Both will register as juvenile sex offenders.

At Safe Alliance, our concern is the treatment of the victim by media before and after the trial, and the public sympathy communicated in support of the teenage rapists. Reports included “the boys were promising students.” Excuses were made for the rapists and there was comment about the loss of the boy’s “promising football careers.” And news reports emphasized time and again that the victim “was drunk.”

In addition, shortly after the verdict, two teenage girls in the community tweeted to the victim threats of bodily harm and homicide for making the defendants “cry in court.”

Our overarching concern is that the victim in this case has not only endured sexual assault, but condescension from the community for bringing this case to trial. Without question, the Steubenville rape case and the attendant media circus will have a chilling effect on future sexual assault victims who may now be reticent to prosecute their attackers for fear of publicity and scorn.

In the aftermath of a case like Steubenville, what can be done to protect and support victims seeking justice?

**Important Messages for Victims:**

* It is never your fault!  No matter what choices you made, no one had a right to assault you.  You are not to blame.
* You have a right to be believed.  Safe Alliance offers nonjudgmental support and validation.
* Help is available.  Safe Alliance provides 24-hour hotline support and hospital accompaniment.  We also provide victim advocacy, support groups, and therapeutic counseling to help survivors heal.

**Important Messages for the General Public:**

* It’s extremely important to believe and support someone who says they’ve been raped or assaulted.  Only 2% of rape allegations are false; it’s ALWAYS best to err on the side of believing the victim and leave the investigating to law enforcement.
* Rape is solely the fault of the perpetrator, NOT the victim.
* Never blame a victim for not fighting back; their only job was to survive.
* Rape does not mean the victim said “no” to sexual contact; rape means the victim did not freely say “yes.”  True consent is clear and enthusiastic.
* We can all do our part to support victims of rape and sexual assault by speaking out against inappropriate jokes and comments and looking out for friends and neighbors.
* While we can all take measures to keep ourselves safe and reduce our risks of being harmed, ultimately only perpetrators can prevent rape from happening.

We strongly agree with Tracy Cox of the National Sexual Violence Resource Center who noted: “When victims hear about threats, it throws a blanket of silence over them. It’s hard enough to get rape victims to press charges and go through the justice system.”

This is a very disturbing reality. As advocates for rape and sexual assault victims we know that perpetrators are predators. And if they are not caught and held accountable, they will continue to commit these horrific crimes.

For more information and interviews with Safe Alliance Chief Strategy Officer Amanda Wilson on this subject, please contact:

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Safe Alliance supports victims of domestic and sexual violence, and child abuse and helps people build safe, healthy relationships.   We do this through a continuum of shelter, counseling, legal and advocacy services serving over 20,000 people a year in Mecklenburg, Cabarrus, Union and south Iredell counties while reaching 20,000 more through advocacy and education.

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