

For Immediate Release

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## **VICTIM RIGHTS LAWYERS IN THE QUINTEZ CEPHUS CASE CALL FOR DECENCY**

**MADISON, Wis. (August 28, 2019)**---On Friday, August 2nd, 2019, a Dane County jury acquitted Mr. Quintez Cephus of sexual assaulting two fellow students. Less than 2 weeks later, University of Wisconsin Chancellor Rebecca Blank granted Mr. Cephus' petition to be reinstated. Now, the two local lawyers who represent the complaining witnesses are speaking out. Rachel Sattler, of Legal Action of Wisconsin's Crime Victims' Rights Project, and Amy Bogost, a solo practitioner specializing in Title IX cases, are:

- calling on University officials to consider how their public comments impact their clients and the large population of UW student sexual assault survivors on campus.
- calling for further inquiry into the unprecedented decision to reverse Mr. Cephus' prior expulsion, a decision made without adequate notice or coherent explanation to their clients and the community.

"We absolutely respect the jury process, even if we disagree with the results. But we cannot accept the certain members of our community and the University acting as though these women are not deserving of even basic human decency", says Attorney Bogost.

Throughout the University disciplinary proceedings, the criminal case, and the aftermath of the verdict, the complaining witnesses have heeded the advice of law enforcement, advocates, prosecutors, and their lawyers and avoided telling their side of the story publicly. Silence, they were told, was best-to protect their privacy and to show respect for the integrity of both the campus and judicial processes.

According to Bogost and Sattler, that decision to remain silent often places survivors in a very difficult position. For example, "while the complaining witnesses avoided the media, Mr. Cephus' team of lawyers spoke regularly to the press. As a result, the public has been flooded with a steady, strategic stream of social media posts, press conferences and interviews, with a singular point of view", explains Attorney Sattler.

From the beginning, Bogost and Sattler's clients immediately became the targets of vile, abhorrent backlash, causing ongoing, credible concern for their physical safety. Since the trial and verdict, the hostility has only gotten worse for them. Emboldened social media trolls have called for their public stoning, their rape, their expulsion, and even their death. "Regardless of a person's opinion about the verdict, we must all condemn such threatening and hostile actions", says Attorney Sattler.

Those consequences were not completely unexpected, given the contentious dynamics of the criminal justice system. But what was unexpected was the University's response. According to Bogost, "The Chancellor's sudden decision without adequate notice or explanation to our clients seems borne out of expediency for the school rather than due process. The University's decision to reverse outcomes without procedural safeguards and transparency that are critical for a legitimate disciplinary process undermines the credibility of the entire Title IX system at UW." "Our clients did exactly what we tell survivors of sexual assault to do - promptly report to the authorities and have faith in those authorities and the administration, " adds Sattler.

What message does the University's action send? Bogost and Sattler say that the message appears to be that students who are the complainants of sexual violence, harassment, and assault cannot trust the decisions of the very administration tasked with protecting the safety of all its students. According to Attorneys Bogost and Sattler, "All students who have been--or who might become--victims of sexual violence and assault deserve better than this. They deserve answers and decency. We intend to get them."

### **About the Attorneys**

Rachel Sattler is an Attorney for Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc.'s Crime Victims' Rights Project, for which she and her colleagues were recipients of Wisconsin Lawyer's 2018 Innovator of the Year Award. In that capacity, Rachel provides free legal representation to victims of crime who want help protecting their privacy and enforcing their rights in criminal cases.

Prior to Rachel's work as a Victim Rights Lawyer, she worked as a prosecutor in Milwaukee County and Dane County for almost 10 years, specializing in the prosecution of sensitive crimes such as sexual assault, crimes against children, trafficking, stalking, and domestic and dating violence.

Amy B. Bogost is an Attorney who provides legal support to survivors of trauma and assault. She has been practicing law since 1989 where she began as a civil rights attorney. She has most recently

focused her practice on the area of Federal Title IX, as well as crime victim representation. She has provided training on the implementation of Title IX within Tribal colleges and has taught at the National Tribal Trial College, co-sponsored and located at the University of Wisconsin Law School. She started a pro bono training for attorneys to aid survivors of sexual assault on campuses in their grievance process.

### **About Legal Action of Wisconsin**

Since 1968, Legal Action of Wisconsin, Inc., a non-profit law firm, has been providing free civil legal aid to marginalized and low-income individuals and families throughout Wisconsin. Legal Action aims to deliver top-quality, personalized legal service to every client it serves. The firm also emphasizes legal work with a broader reach, aimed at systemic changes that will help more people achieve a decent quality of life. With offices in six cities, Legal Action serves 39 southern Wisconsin counties with 78 staff attorneys and about 50 support staff. Legal Action's work is funded by many different public and private sources, including the federally-funded Legal Services Corporation, and has hundreds of active volunteer attorneys who supplement, enhance, and support our staff attorneys' case work.

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