

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 12, 2014

Mr. George Will
The Washington Post
1150 15th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20071

Dear Mr. Will,

Having an ongoing interest in ways to reduce sexual assaults on college campuses, we read your June 6 column on campus sexual assault with particular dismay. Your thesis and statistics fly in the face of everything we know about this issue. More egregiously, you trivialize the scourge of sexual assault, putting the phrase in scare quotes and treating this crime as a socially acceptable phenomenon. It is in fact a spreading epidemic, and you legitimize the myths that victims and victim advocates have worked tirelessly for decades to combat.

Your column reiterates ancient beliefs about sexual assault that are inconsistent with the reality of victims' experiences, based on what we have heard directly from survivors. Your words contribute to the exact culture that discourages reporting and forces victims into hiding and away from much-needed services. For starters, your notion about a perceived privileged status of survivors of sexual assault on campuses runs completely counter to the experiences described to us.

In meetings our offices have held with law enforcement, students, administrators, parents and university officials, we found that the culture on campuses, including harassment by fellow students and college officials, discourages survivors from reporting or seeking much needed services in the wake of a traumatic attack. Additionally, recent legislative and administrative actions at the federal level have received positive feedback from both survivor advocacy groups and institutions of higher education. Your column suggests that we – including some of us who have worked on this issue for many years – all have missed a subculture on college campuses where survivors of sexual assault are inducted into a privileged class.

The culture you described is so antiquated, so counterintuitive and so contrary to anything we heard that we hope you will make an effort to hear the stories survivors bravely shared with us about the struggles they face in addressing what has happened to them – often with little meaningful assistance from authorities expected to help them. In this instance, your writing, which purports to be based on accurate facts and figures, has not only shown a fundamental disrespect to survivors, but also includes a harmful rhetoric that has made addressing this issue so difficult. Your column questions the accuracy of statistics around this problem. Very few of our conversations with students included numbers; what we have heard are personal experiences – horrifying and tragic stories that show exactly why this problem must be addressed. There is no acceptable number of sexual assaults; anything more than zero is unacceptable.

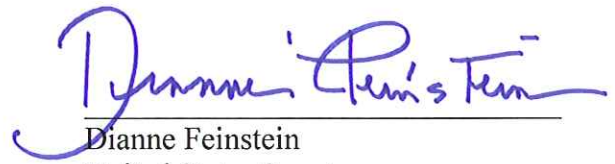
We will continue our efforts to reduce sexual assaults on college campuses, and we ask that you listen to the people we are hearing from on this issue. Our efforts both in Washington and in our home states are well-documented, and we have found people to be extraordinarily willing to share their experiences as we work together to address this terrible epidemic. We believe you will find their experiences to be in stark contrast to any stories you have heard regarding people with a “coveted status” and “privilege.”

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator



Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.
United States Senator