

Center pushes for more awareness of sexual assaults

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STAMFORD - State Rep. William Tong, D-Stamford, attended Brown University in the 1990s, when female students there had scrawled the names of alleged male rapists on the library's bathroom walls.

"There were several incidents at what is by most accounts a liberal, open, comfortable and safe Ivy League community," Tong said yesterday in the Government Center lobby. "Young women were being sexually assaulted, as they continue to be all over the country."

Tong, a 1995 Brown graduate, spoke at a news conference held by the Sexual Assault Crisis and Education Center to begin its monthlong 2008 Say it Loud Campaign. Tong's wife, Elizabeth, serves on the center's board of directors.

The Stamford-based center is a nonprofit organization that provides outreach, support and confidentiality to victims of sexual assault in lower Fairfield County. It also maintains a 24-hour hot line for counseling and offers free educational programs to schools.

Executive Director Cathy Malloy, wife of Mayor Dannel Malloy, said raising awareness of sexual assault on college campuses is one of the center's most pressing concerns. The center has seen an increase of college-age women seeking counseling during school breaks, Cathy Malloy said.

Still, only 10 percent to 16 percent of all sexual assault crimes are reported to police, Malloy said.

"It's always been happening, but now because there's awareness and services, people are coming and saying, 'My daughter came home from college and she was assaulted during some party, and she doesn't know who it was or what happened,' " Malloy said.

Though many think of rape and sexual assault as a women's issue, Malloy said 35 percent to 40 percent of victims are male.

Malloy said the center counseled 377 primary and secondary victims of sexual assault in the past year. Twenty percent of those were under age 18, she said.

Other speakers included Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia, Greenwich First Selectman Peter Tesei and Darien First Selectwoman Evonne Klein. Dannel Malloy served as the event's host. Local police chiefs and officers also attended.

Moccia called for more state and federal aid in educating residents about sexual assault.

"It's still a hidden problem in America," Moccia said. "I don't think enough people know about it."

Victims don't report sexual assaults because of the social stigma attached to the crime, Cathy Malloy said, as well as feelings of guilt, shame and self-blame. The only way to combat that stigma is with outreach and advocacy, Malloy said.

In addition to safety on college campuses, Malloy said the center is also focusing on preventing sexual assault over the Internet with workshops on the subject.

During the Say it Loud campaign, the Sexual Assault Crisis and Education Center will set up displays in libraries and town halls in Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Stamford, Weston, Westport and Wilton.

- After the campaign, the center will hold a fundraiser on Friday, May 9, featuring food, wine and a live auction in Greenwich with Alan Kalter of "The Late Show with David Letterman." For information or reservations call 348-9346.

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