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## **PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

# **NSVRC STATEMENT ON HUNG JURY IN COSBY TRIAL**

**Harrisburg, PA** – Following the announcement of a hung jury in the criminal trial of comedian Bill Cosby, National Sexual Violence Resource Center Chief Public Affairs Officer Kristen Houser issued the following statement:

“All Americans accused of a crime are entitled to a trial by a jury of their peers. That right is essential to our criminal justice system, and the standard of evidence that must be met for a criminal conviction is by necessity quite high. In fact, the high standard of evidence required for criminal convictions is one reason why the criminal justice system cannot be the only avenue for sexual assault survivors to seek justice. It remains important for victims to be given the opportunity to tell their stories and for individuals and organizations to better respond to sexual violence and create safer environments.

“The proceedings in the Cosby trial over the past week have also demonstrated the widespread challenges encountered by victims of sexual assault and prosecutors across the country. The American public often expects victims of sexual assault to behave in ways that are frequently different from how they actually behave. In addition, we must continue hold those who commit sexual violence accountable, regardless of their position in the community, their power, their fame, or their wealth. The effective investigation and prosecution of cases at every level is key to changing the way our society responds to survivors of assault.

“What we do and say about the issue of sexual violence matters. By increasing understanding of the issue, we can more effectively respond to survivors, enhance community safety, and ultimately prevent sexual violence.”

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

NSVRC encourages communities to prioritize safety by recognizing the following facts about sexual assault:

- **Delayed reporting is normal:** Sexual abuse can cause intense feelings of shame, embarrassment, fear and humiliation. Victims often feel terrified of other people learning what has been done to them. That fear can keep victims silent for years after the abuse. When intoxicants are used as part of the assault, gaps in memory and fears of how others may react to learning about the use of drugs and alcohol can compound feelings of shame, self-blame and silence.
- **Inconsistencies in statements are common after traumatic events:** A large body of research on traumatic memory shows that the brain processes sensory information very differently during a traumatic event than during normal, non-threatening events. It is normal for victims of sexual assault, veterans of war, police who have been in the line of fire and victims of car accidents and others who have experienced traumatic events to:
  - o Have difficulty recalling details in a linear timeline
  - o Recall certain sensory information (smells, sounds, sights, etc.) but without context
  - o Have visual memories of parts of the event but not have words to communicate them due to trauma

As such, inconsistent statements are common and should be expected to be made by survivors of traumatic events, including sexual assault.

- **There is a significant difference between demonstrating “romantic interest” and testing a person’s boundaries:** Many people who perpetrate sexual assault test boundaries beforehand - this is sometimes called “grooming.” Perpetrators may judge how a person reacts to suggestive comments, unnecessary physical touch or offers to spend time in private. They are testing whether their actions will be actively or verbally discouraged or if they will be tolerated or ignored in the way that many women are socially conditioned to respond to unwanted advances that aren’t “overly intrusive.” They are testing to see how far they can push boundaries and exploit trust.

— END —

## ABOUT NSVRC

The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) is the leading nonprofit in providing information and tools to prevent and respond to sexual violence. NSVRC translates research and trends into best practices that help individuals, communities and service providers achieve real and lasting change. The center also works with the media to promote informed reporting. Every April, NSVRC leads Sexual Assault Awareness Month (SAAM), a campaign to educate and engage the public in addressing this widespread issue. NSVRC is also one of the three founding organizations of Raliance, a national, collaborative initiative dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation.