

Menu



**NYPD**

Search

Newsroom Publications Video

# **Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill's Apology to the Survivor of the 1994 Prospect Park Rape Case**

October 28, 2018

The survivor of the 1994 Prospect Park rape case suffered a terrible ordeal when she was brutally violated. And there is zero justification for the additional trauma she endured when her word was doubted by authorities investigating her claim, and a writer for a major New York City daily newspaper, who — citing unnamed NYPD sources — predicted in print that she would soon be arrested for filing a false report.

This woman's pain was only made worse by our collective actions, which were and always will be wholly antithetical to the values of the NYPD. She had the courage and strength to report a heinous crime, to push our detectives to conduct a full and thorough investigation, and to try to help apprehend her attacker and protect other women. But we let her down in almost every possible way.

We were wrong then. I want us to be right today.

To the survivor: As Police Commissioner, I extend my heartfelt apology for all aspersions cast upon your credibility by NYPD personnel those many years ago. And I apologize for the NYPD's role in the quarter-century of questions that so wrongly surrounded your case. We know the damage that sexual assaults inflict on survivors. Compounding that damage with insensitive comments and wild conspiracy theories only further amplifies the cruelty and injustice of the initial crime itself. For that, I am deeply and profoundly sorry.

Someone who is without fault here is the original case investigator, Detective Andrea Sorrentino, who, prior to her 2003 retirement, was an outstanding example of professionalism in our Brooklyn Special Victims Squad. She thoroughly investigated every lead using the methods and techniques available to us at the time. And I commend her for her dedication to this case and for the empathy and compassion she showed the survivor.

I am grateful, too, for the improved forensic technology that, in the intervening years, has now allowed us to affirm — at long last, and beyond the shadow of a doubt — that the Prospect Park survivor absolutely told the truth. Not only was she attacked, but she was assaulted by a serial offender who also raped at least 10 other women. And, just as in any type of case we investigate — but especially a sexual assault — even if our investigators were to harbor doubts, expressing those doubts publicly is always wrong.

While there are many horrific aspects of this miscarriage of justice, there is one egregious piece I want to shine a light on: This rape survivor was suspected of inventing the crime to publicize a planned rally protesting violence against lesbians. I firmly believe that no one in the NYPD would draw such an implausible and ridiculous conclusion today. This police department has come a long way since 1994 in our response to sexual assaults and in our understanding of, and respect for, the LGBTQ community. And our Special Victims Squad investigators who pursue instances of sexual assault today have more tools, better training and resources, and greater skills than ever before.

I am deeply saddened by the rift this case created between law enforcement, brave survivors of sexual assault, and the LGBTQ community, with whom we work so closely each day. And I want to be clear: We take what happened to the victim of the brutal assault that night in Prospect Park, and to others every year, extremely seriously. But in this case, we fell short in an important area: Simple humanity.

Respect is the cornerstone of policing. It goes hand-in-hand with believing survivors, launching honest and thorough investigations, bringing comfort, and caring for those in need. That is why people join the law enforcement profession: to help others. It will always be fundamental to how we safeguard our city — and essential to restoring and building trust, and strengthening relationships with all the people we serve, in every community.