

Help Defeat Bullying Tactics Stand in Support of Survivors



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Dear Colleagues and Allies:

EVAWI's Start by Believing campaign is transforming the responses of professionals and the public to disclosures of sexual assault. Within the criminal justice system, the philosophy aims to improve the response to courageous victims who come forward, place their trust in our institutions, and report in an effort to seek help, pursue justice, and keep our communities safe.

As the 4th Annual Start by Believing Day approaches on April 3rd, we want to congratulate the thousands of individuals and organizations who are working so hard to create positive change in our communities. We recognize the hard work this requires and the all-too-often uphill nature of the battles you must fight to make that change.

To add to these challenges, the Start by Believing philosophy, and other victim-centered and trauma-informed reforms are currently under attack. We are writing to tell you more about these attacks, and the tactics you might see in your own community. We are also asking for your help to take action and support the work we all believe in.

Whether you are engaged in a Start by Believing campaign or not, we ask that you stand in solidarity with EVAWI to make sure that these bullying and intimidation tactics are recognized for what they are, and to ensure that the many advances we have made regarding victim-centered and trauma-informed initiatives - so vital to our country's progress in responding to sexual violence - are understood and supported.

We also ask you to take action by posting on social media and adding your thoughts with hashtags such as #StartbyBelieving, #EVAWI2019, #MuteRKelly, #MeToo, #TimesUp, #NoMore, #WhyIDidn'tReport, and #BelieveSurvivors.

Where is the Integrity?

For more than two years, an organization called the Center for Prosecutor Integrity (CPI) has attempted to disparage EVAWI and our Start by Believing campaign, among other initiatives. Despite the name, CPI does not represent or serve prosecutors, nor does it act with integrity. CPI's partner in these attacks has been Stop Abusive and Violent Environments (SAVE), which in 2012 was identified by the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) as a misogynistic website. Because there is such extensive overlap in the people and publications from these two organizations, they can be seen as largely interchangeable.



Start by Believing

SEEK THEN SPEAK

According to their website, CPI is “working to strengthen prosecutorial ethics, restore the presumption of innocence, and end wrongful convictions.” Yet despite their purported interest in protecting the falsely accused, they have continuously made false statements about our organization and programs, by misquoting our training materials, and providing excerpts from these materials without the proper context to understand their meaning within our entire portfolio of substantive criminal justice training materials.

To illustrate, CPI and SAVE often share posts from EVAWI and Start by Believing on their own social media sites, with critical messages that mischaracterize the content of the original post or the campaign message. These posts often include, and then generate, derogatory comments targeted at specific individuals and organizations, including survivors, their loved ones, and organizations involved in Start by Believing.

To provide just one example among many, CPI and SAVE shared an identical post from EVAWI on October 31, 2018, adding this comment: “As false allegations spin out of control, SBB continues its campaign to bias police investigations in favor of the accuser.”

Such posts then generate comments that are inaccurate, misleading and/or hostile. Again, to provide just one example, EVAWI posted a video on our Start by Believing page on December 28, 2018, with students holding up placards and taking the SBB pledge. SAVE shared the post on their own Facebook page with the comment: “Does this look more like a religious revival or an old-fashioned cult?” Someone then commented: “Not a f***ing chance. I believe evidence not some hysterical progressive [sic] nonsense. You are the definition of buffoonery.”

Over time, their attacks have become increasingly vicious, even encouraging violence. In many instances, they have directly targeted survivors and their support people. We believe it is one thing to attack EVAWI and the Start by Believing campaign, but it is quite another to attack survivors and their loved ones who have the courage to speak out about their experiences. They have repeatedly done both on our social media sites.

Escalating Tactics

In February 2018, CPI escalated their attack by sending a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) wrongly accusing EVAWI of abusing federal grant funds. This was just another harassing and intimidating tactic of CPI’s that went nowhere. EVAWI has met our grant objectives and faithfully fulfilled the goals of each of our awards. Over the years, our stewardship of federal grant money has been characterized by honesty, integrity and transparency.

Furthermore, the Start by Believing campaign is not directly supported with federal funds. EVAWI has used its own discretionary funds to develop campaign materials and disseminated them with funding from non-federal sources. To learn more about the Start by Believing campaign in the context of other victim-centered and trauma-informed responses, we wrote a [brief history](#) which we posted on our website. We have also posted a [point-by-point refutation of the false claims made by CPI](#). You may find these documents useful, in case you need to defend against any similar false statements or harassment.

Just this month, CPI stepped up their attacks by sending [letters such as these](#) directly to police departments and prosecutors' offices, repeating inaccurate and false information about EVAWI and the Start by Believing campaign. In some instances, they have included requests for [public records along with their letters](#). These efforts are designed to discourage criminal justice agencies and others from participating in or otherwise supporting the Start by Believing philosophy at a critical time in our nation's history. In case you receive such a letter, we have developed powerful tools and tactics to defend your important work.

Not Just Start by Believing

CPI's actions and rhetoric are part of an alarming national trend where hate groups are becoming increasingly empowered to intimidate those who advocate for critical civil rights and social justice issues, such as tackling the rampant problem of sexual violence. Based on the vitriolic nature of CPI's attacks, it appears that their true purpose is to attempt to derail the progress of victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches to sexual assault investigations advocated by EVAWI and many other organizations and allies.

EVAWI strongly believes that victim-centered, trauma-informed initiatives are vital to our country's progress in responding to sexual violence. If we do not Start by Believing the accounts of survivors, and conduct thorough and fair evidence-based investigations, perpetrators will remain free to abuse others. This violence can continue unchecked for decades, as in the cases of Dr. Larry Nassar, Bill Cosby, and perpetrators within the Catholic Church. As one of the women assaulted by Nassar said, as she stood with others at the 2018 ESPY Awards, "If just one adult had listened, believed, and acted, the people standing before you on this stage would have never met him."

Moreover, EVAWI stands behind the message and philosophy of our Start by Believing campaign, which aims to reverse long-held misconceptions about sexual violence that can lead people to treat those who report with a skeptical or biased mindset. This is the first step in conducting a fair, thorough, and professional evidence-based investigation.

We also directly challenge the notion that a Start by Believing philosophy means a law enforcement investigation is biased against the suspect. When someone reports that they were sexually assaulted, the best approach for gathering information is to Start by Believing. For a crime as intensely personal and humiliating as sexual assault, victims will only be able to provide the necessary information within a safe and trusting environment.

However, this does not mean the investigator assumes a crime was committed, that the elements of an offense have been met, or the suspect is guilty of committing a crime. It isn't a matter of one or the other. Only with a thorough and professional investigation will those questions be answered. EVAWI's training materials are designed to help law enforcement accomplish just that by improving their investigative strategies and techniques.

To that extent, EVAWI's position is squarely aligned with Constitutionally-protected due process rights for those identified as suspects or defendants during a criminal investigation or prosecution. We reject any implication from CPI or SAVE that our programs and training materials erode these long-existing legal protections.

Take Action

We need your help to defeat these bullying tactics and continue improving responses to sexual assault survivors. Here are just a few ways that you can take action:

1. Learn more about the campaign philosophy and tools at the [Start by Believing website](#).
2. Make your own [personal pledge](#) to Start by Believing, when someone tells you they were raped or sexually assaulted.
3. Speak out against attacks on the Start by Believing philosophy and other victim-centered, trauma-informed reforms, both on social media and in the community.
4. Continue to spread the Start by Believing message, by launching a new campaign or expanding an existing one, and encouraging others to stand in support of survivors.
5. Consider [donating](#) to EVAWI and the Start by Believing campaign, to advance our crucial work to improve responses to sexual assault.

To Learn More

To learn more about EVAWI's work, please see our [2018 annual report](#).

For more information about Start by Believing, visit www.startbybelieving.org. In particular, please see the [FAQ page](#), which provides information to help respond to misinformed and misguided attacks like CPI's.

EVAWI has also published several Training Bulletins with detailed guidance:

[*Start by Believing to Improve Responses to Sexual Assault and Prevent Gender Bias*](#)

[*Interviews with Victims and Suspects: Start by Believing and the Question of Bias*](#)

[*Start by Believing: Evaluating the Impact of a Public Awareness Campaign Designed to Change the Community Response to Sexual Assault*](#)