



PRESS STATEMENT

March 21, 2022

Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence Stands with Survivors Amid News of Deshaun Watson Joining Cleveland Browns

On Friday, March 18, 2022, it was revealed that the Cleveland Browns are bringing Deshaun Watson to their team, despite over 20 allegations of sexual violence against the player. This decision by the Browns has unfortunately had a very negative affect on victims and survivors of sexual violence, and those who care about them, all over the nation and particularly in Ohio. The Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence (OAESV) stands with survivors in our state and everywhere.

While today is a historic day in our nation with the public hearings for confirmation of the first ever Black woman justice commencing, it seems we live in parallel worlds. One world where everything seems equitable and inclusive, and one where, ironically, we scrutinize this accomplished Black woman. On top of that, we learned the news of Watson joining the Browns, with his 22 active civil lawsuits including incrimination of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

This is an upsetting reminder to many survivors and advocates in Ohio and around the country, that the legal system can be, and often is, used as a way to diminish the experiences of survivors. At times, it has failed to truly support survivors of sexual violence, given that only 7 of every 1000 instances of rape lead to a felony conviction of the rapistⁱ.

We must remember that morality and a "result" from the criminal legal system are not the same thing -- just because a grand jury declines to indict an offender, does not mean they are necessarily "innocent" of the accusation or of harm, nor does it mean that the sexual assault(s) in question did not occur. Rather, this shows the limits and harms of the system itself.

This is also a reminder of the victim blaming that happens when survivors come forward; of how powerful men can move throughout our society, causing harm or even being suspected of causing harm, but not being held accountable; and how many people focus on athletics and the "winning" benefits rather than the harm caused to so many. When powerful institutions that reach and influence such large portions of our population make decisions like this, it reinforces that survivors of sexual assault, and the issue of sexual assault in general, matter little in comparison to the opportunity to win championships and make money.

Where is the justice? The equity and inclusiveness? Where is the advancement of gender justice? Where is the outrage for gender-based violence? Last week we celebrated the reauthorization of VAWA (Violence Against Women Act), which had been stalled for 5 years, but has there been any advancement?

The NFL organization and teams like the Browns continue to tolerate, condone, and monetize misogynistic behaviors of abusers to attract fans, generate revenues, and win games. This feeds into the exploitation of women and others based on their gender, the victim-blaming mentality, and a culture of oppression and gender inequalities. These behaviors are sickening.

Survivors are tired of being silenced by power and control dynamics, and advocates are exhausted from fighting battles that continue to tip over to the wrong side of justice! We need to do better as a society to embrace the voices and outcry of so many in Ohio!

Action Steps:

- Become more connected to your local rape crisis program, offering them support by possibly volunteering, following their social media to amplify messages, and voting with their needs in mind.
 - Find the program closest to you at www.oaesv.org/Map
- Learn more about sexual violence by visiting www.OAESV.org and becoming a member
- Support OAESV and your local rape crisis programs by donating funds at www.oaesv.org/Donate or again by finding your local center on the OAESV map

*This statement will continue to be updated with supporting signatures.

Statement Supported By:

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Interviews available upon request.

As Ohio's statewide coalition, OAESV uses an anti-oppression lens to advocate for comprehensive responses and rape crisis services for survivors and to empower communities to prevent sexual violence.

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ⁱ <https://www.rainn.org/articles/what-expect-criminal-justice-system>