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6th District Alderwoman

Denim Day reflections on officer's plea deal

Statement from Alderwoman Milele A. Cogg April 24, 2013

I chose to release this statement on **Denim Day** (please see note below) because as we think of victims of sexual assault, we often only think of women, but men are also victims (I have read that 2.78 million men in the U.S. have been victims of sexual assault or rape). Unfortunately, one can see this in Milwaukee by looking at the recent Milwaukee Police Department illegal strip/cavity search case, in which all victims were male.

It is appalling to me that seven counts of sexual assault against Officer Vagnini were dismissed, and that he does not have to register as a sex offender as part of a plea agreement after touching victims' genitalia -- and making anal intrusions in some cases -- while supposedly searching for evidence. Plea deals that do not hold offenders accountable, no matter who they are, are inexcusable because they re-injure those who were violated in the first place.

Officers are entrusted to protect and serve, and when that public trust is violated it has to be appropriately handled. In the case of Officer Vagnini, I do not believe the system handled the case appropriately. When one considers how difficult it was for those violated to come forward and tell their stories, I am very concerned that future victims, seeing these results, will simply remain silent, thinking the personal cost of speaking up and seeking justice is too high.

To justly and seriously work to end sexual assault and sexual violence is to first discuss and admit its existence.

The fact that all MPD officers involved have remained on the payroll while these investigations move forward is equally appalling. Taxpayer dollars should not be paying these officers, and because the legal system has come up short, it is my sincere hope that, at the very least, none of these officers found to have participated are returned to duty. I believe getting them off the street will remove the possibility that they will commit or stand by as future acts of such degrading, dehumanizing violence are carried out.

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NOTE: Today – April 24, 2013 – is **Denim Day** in Milwaukee, a day devoted to raising awareness about sexual assault. The day is rooted in a 1999 Italian Supreme Court ruling that overturned a driving instructor’s rape conviction because his student victim was wearing tight jeans. The Justices stated that because removing tight fitting jeans couldn’t be possible if the victim were struggling, therefore the victim must have assisted the attacker in removing her jeans, which they felt implied consent. After that ruling, tens of thousands of Italians – and many more around the world – wore jeans in support of the victim and in protest to the decision. Today, communities all over the world celebrate Denim Day in April, which is National Sexual Assault Awareness Month.