



OFFICE OF THE HENNEPIN COUNTY ATTORNEY

MICHAEL O. FREEMAN COUNTY ATTORNEY

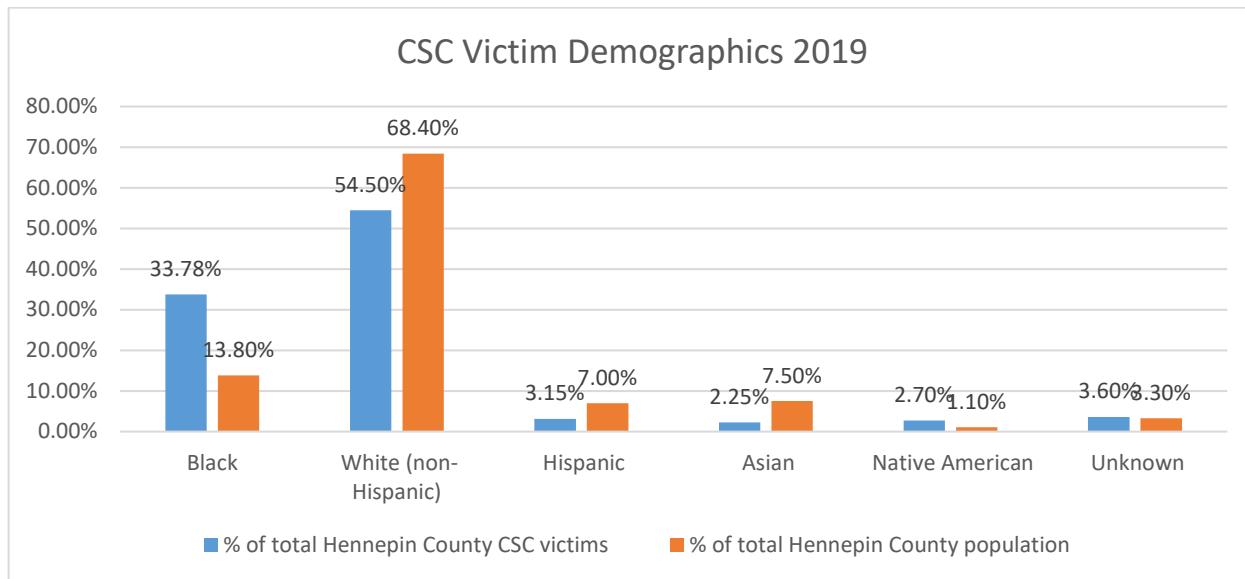
3/8/2021

RE: Criminal Sexual Conduct Statutory Reform Working Group (CSCSRWG)
Recommendations (HF 707)

Dear Committee Chair and Members:

We write to address an important issue raised in testimony during the House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Committee hearing regarding HF 707. Several members of the committee expressed the desire to ask questions of testifiers and receive additional information regarding portions of this bill, and we hope that this letter will help address at least some of those questions.

Several testifiers noted that there are racial disparities in the area of sexual violence. For instance, in her testimony in support of HF 707, Rebecca St. George noted that sexual violence disproportionately affects women of color. Our office has closely studied data relating to these disparities in an effort to understand and remedy them and those data strongly support Ms. St. George's testimony. Of the cases submitted to the Hennepin County Attorney's Office for review of adult criminal sexual conduct charges, 41.9% of the victims were people of color. That represents a 33% increase over the share of the population in Hennepin County who are people of color. Black and Indigenous victims were particularly overrepresented – each exceeded their shares of the population by 2.5 times. Studies also show that other vulnerable populations, such as those who identify as LGBTQ are also significantly more likely to be victims of sexual violence.



Other speakers discussed disparities for offenders. We acknowledge that disparities exist in the criminal justice system and that there is work to do. But the data show that perpetrators of sexual violence are more reflective of the community as a whole than non-CSC offenders. A 2018 Minnesota Sentencing Guidelines Commission report on statewide CSC offenses concluded that “Sex offenders are … more likely to be white or Hispanic and less likely to be [B]lack than other offenders.” Our data from Hennepin County confirms this. Cases submitted for review involving adult CSC offenders with adult victims have a significantly lower percentage of Black offenders (47.8% vs. 56.8%) and Indigenous offenders (1.4% vs 4.3%) than non-CSC person crimes.

We believe these data support the notion that the criminal justice system can – and should – do more to protect the vulnerable from sexual violence by strengthening our sexual assault laws. Thank you for your close attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

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