

**Victim Impact Statement — RH**

**Case # ST-15-LR-394**

June 14, 2016

Judge Francois:

To stand before you today at this sentencing to expose my suffering is both painful and humiliating. I chose to return to the Virgin Islands, as hard as that has been because I wanted you to hear my own voice. I am here because the man before you, who violently raped me last August, knew what he was doing and even now shows no meaningful remorse for what he did to me. I wanted to tell the court in person that a man who would do this to an 18-year-old girl deserves a severe punishment and does not deserve the leniency he has already received from the plea bargain offered without my input.

Last August 13, on the last day of my summer internship, I went for a hike in the Virgin Islands National Park on the Ram's Head Trail. I remember that it was a beautiful day. I remember thinking about how much I had enjoyed being on St John. I had no idea that my life was about to change and that the beautiful morning would end with my being raped and choked – not once, but twice – and fearing for my life.

Not a day goes by when what was done to me does not interfere with my life or limit the life I lead in some way. Within 24 hours of my assault, I flew home — numb, bruised and alone. When I first saw my parents they were mostly silent — unable to process the emotion of what had happened to me. What was intended to be a short two weeks before my senior year of high school, turned into a period of withdrawal and of trying to begin the process of figuring out how to move forward. I passed many days in fear. I did not want to be among strangers or in crowds and spent a lot of time in my room. Many nights I woke up with visions of the attack running through my head.

I live in a small town, and there aren't any counselors that specialize in helping rape victims. The nearest person that I could see was two hours away. So late last August, as a first step, my mother and I started our weekly journeys to visit a counselor. I reduced my school schedule and my mother gave up a day of work to make this happen. There have been a lot of tears, but I have started the process of trying to understand what happened to me.

Many things changed this year. To get through high school, I had to modify my academic schedule and limit my course load. I still don't sleep peacefully or feel sure of myself. I have chosen to stay close to home this summer so I could both stay involved in this case and because I don't feel comfortable or safe either on my own or very far away from familiar surroundings.

Eventually, I know I will learn to build a support system for myself when I go to college — but even that process was affected by this crime. I will go away this fall — but not too far. Last fall, instead of becoming a student of what school might be the best fit for me, I became a student of college rape statistics. I only applied to schools where the incidence of rape was