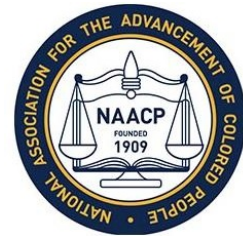


Lebanon County Board of Commissioners
Commissioner Robert J. Phillips
Commissioner Michael J. Kuhn
Commissioner Jo Ellen Litz
Room 207, Municipal Building
400 South 8th Street
Lebanon, PA 17042-6794



December 17, 2024

Dear Commissioners Kuhn, Litz, and Phillips,

With this letter, the Lebanon County Branch of the NAACP expresses to you its deep concern about the pattern of responses by the Office of Lebanon County District Attorney Pier Hess Graf to allegations of rape and sexual assault as documented in a year-long investigation recently published by PennLive, "Special Report on Sex Crimes." The nine articles in this series are listed with their URLs at the end of this letter.

Among the most troubling patterns identified by the PennLive investigation:

- The system for reporting rape and sexual assault is difficult for victims to access.
- The process seems "designed to wear down victims" via delay tactics.
- The Lebanon County DA's Office has a demonstrated pattern of not filing charges in cases where the victim knows their attacker, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of rape and sexual assault victims nationwide know their attacker (see "Most Victims Know Their Attacker," National Institute of Justice, at <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/most-victims-know-their-attacker>).
- In the case of alleged rape victim Veronika Rodriguez, the DA's Office not only refused to file charges against the alleged rapist, but after what two experts characterized as a "seriously flawed" investigation, charged the victim with filing a false police report in an ongoing prosecution.
- Out of 67 counties in PA, "Lebanon County ranked eighth lowest in the state for the rate of sex crimes prosecutions in 2022 and 2023, based on the number of sex crimes reported." In addition, "Lebanon County ranked 66 out of 67 counties" in terms of the "number of sex cases filed last year per capita."
- To date, the DA's Office has exhibited a troubling lack of transparency and accountability, refusing to respond to any media inquiries about these matters despite repeated requests via email, phone calls, and office visits.

In light of the foregoing, we are sending a letter to District Attorney Pier Hess Graf expressing our concerns and asking for written responses to our questions. That letter is appended to this letter.

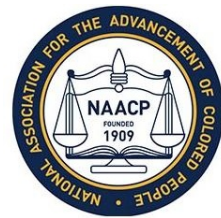
We respectfully ask that the Board of Commissioners look carefully into this matter by asking the District Attorney's Office to respond publicly and in writing to the questions we posed in our letter directed to her office.

Respectfully,

The Executive Committee
Lebanon County NAACP Branch 26AA-B
P.O. Box 74, Annville PA 17003
Email : naacp.leb.co.pa@gmail.com
Website : <https://lebanonnaacp.org/>

Appendix : Letter from the Executive Committee of the Lebanon County NAACP to Lebanon County District Attorney Pier Hess Graf

District Attorney Pier Hess Graf
Office of the District Attorney, County of Lebanon
400 S 8th Street, Room 11
Lebanon, PA 17042



December 17, 2024

Dear District Attorney Hess Graf,

We write to express our deep concerns about the pattern of responses by your office to allegations of rape and sexual assault as documented in a year-long investigation published by PennLive in a series of nine articles. These articles are listed with their URLs at the end of this letter.

Among the most troubling patterns identified in the PennLive investigation are the following:

- The system for reporting rape and sexual assault is difficult for victims to access.
- The process seems “designed to wear down victims” via delay tactics.
- Your office has a demonstrated pattern of not filing charges in cases where the victim knows their attacker, despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of rape and sexual assault victims nationwide know their attacker (see “Most Victims Know Their Attacker,” National Institute of Justice, at <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/most-victims-know-their-attacker>).
- In the case of alleged rape victim Veronika Rodriguez, your office not only refused to file charges against the alleged rapist, but after what two experts characterized as a “seriously flawed” investigation, charged the victim with filing a false police report in an ongoing prosecution.
- Out of 67 counties in PA, “Lebanon County ranked eighth lowest in the state for the rate of sex crimes prosecutions in 2022 and 2023, based on the number of sex crimes reported.” In addition, “Lebanon County ranked 66 out of 67 counties” in terms of the “number of sex cases filed last year per capita.”
- To date your office has exhibited a troubling lack of transparency and accountability, refusing to respond to any media inquiries about these matters despite repeated requests via email, phone calls, and office visits.

In light of the foregoing, we are concerned that your office is not adhering to its own mission statement as this appears prominently at the top of your official webpage, at <https://www.lebanoncountypa.gov/departments/da>

“Our office mission statement is promoting safety through innovative and collaborative approaches to crime prevention and prosecution while maintaining our commitment to victims’ rights, offender rehabilitation, consumer protection, and public engagement.”

The PennLive investigation of the pattern of responses by your office to allegations of sexual abuse appears to show an egregious failure to fulfill its “commitment to victims’ rights” and an equally egregious failure to fulfill its commitment to “public engagement.”

In light of these concerns, we respectfully ask your office to provide written responses to the following questions:

1. What is the policy of your office regarding an allegation of sexual assault made by an acquaintance of the victim? According to the PennLive investigation of Mandy’s case, two state police officers investigating Mandy’s case in 2021 told her: “You shouldn't expect charges because you know him. Acquaintance rape rarely gets charged.” The article continues:

"State police told PennLive they were unable to assess how often cases of acquaintance rape are prosecuted in Lebanon County. They declined to say whether a trooper would tell a victim they should expect charges to be filed for such a case. Lt. Adam Reed said state police thoroughly investigate each case and directed further questions to the Lebanon County district attorney, who did not respond to requests for an interview."

2. Does your office have a written response protocol for allegations of sexual assault, i.e., a document that describes its sexual assault response protocol? If so, can that document be made publicly available? And if not, why is there no written protocol? Relatedly, why did your office decide to stop applying for federal STOP funding (Services, Training, Officers, and Prosecutors) from the PA Commission on Crime & Delinquency?
3. Does your office disagree with any aspect of the PennLive article on its decision to charge Veronika Rodriguez with filing a false police report for her allegations of rape? The article states that that two experts contend that the police investigation of Ms. Rodriguez was "seriously flawed," citing several specific examples. Please explain.
4. Why has your office failed to respond to any media inquiries about these issues? And how does that failure square with your mission statement's "commitment to . . . public engagement"?

Respectfully,

The Executive Committee
Lebanon County NAACP Branch 26AA-B
P.O. Box 74, Annville PA 17003
Email : naacp.leb.co.pa@gmail.com | Website : <https://lebanonnaacp.org/>

Appendix: Articles in PennLive's "Special Report on Sex Crimes" series by Christine Vendel and Jenna Wise, Nov.-Dec. 2024

1. **"We need to believe our victims': How some areas get sex crime prosecutions right"** , at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2024/11/we-need-to-believe-our-victims-how-some-areas-get-sex-crime-prosecutions-right.html>

2. **“I felt attacked by them’: Sex assault victims find Pa. prosecutors take on few cases. Why?”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2024/11/i-felt-attacked-by-them-sex-assault-victims-find-pa-prosecutors-take-on-few-cases-why.html>
3. **“She says a military officer raped her. Police in Lebanon County charged her instead”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2024/11/she-says-a-military-officer-raped-her-police-in-lebanon-county-charged-her-instead.html>
4. **“DA promises change in county with Pa.’s lowest rate of prosecuting sex offenses”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2024/11/da-promises-change-in-county-with-pas-lowest-rate-of-prosecuting-sex-offenses.html>
5. **“These big Pa. counties file charges in few sex crimes, denying justice to victims”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/crime/2024/11/these-big-pa-counties-file-few-sex-crimes-denying-courthouse-justice-to-hundreds-of-victims.html>
6. **“A Pa. freshman reported being raped in her dorm. Like many others, the case went nowhere”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2024/11/a-pa-freshman-reported-being-raped-in-her-dorm-like-many-others-the-case-went-nowhere.html>
7. **“Sex assault victims turned away by DAs have few options. Here they are”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/crime/2024/11/sex-assault-victims-turned-away-by-das-have-few-options-here-they-are.html>
8. **“When is sexual contact consensual? ‘If you’re unsure, it’s a no”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2024/11/when-is-sexual-contact-consensual-if-youre-unsure-its-a-no.html>
9. **“Special report on sex crimes: Here’s how we did it”**, at <https://www.pennlive.com/news/2024/11/special-report-on-sex-crimes-heres-how-we-did-it.html>