

November 13, 2012

To Whom it May Concern:

In regards to the sentencing of Oscar Corneja-Pena who has plead guilty to four counts of misdemeanor sexual abuse (U.S. v. Oscar Corneja-Pena 2012CMD14860).

We represent the views of several residents of Dupont Circle who have followed the case of recent sexual assaults in our neighborhood. Though we work closely with the Dupont Circle ANC (2B), the views below are not that of the ANC.

We are pleased that the police identified and arrested Mr. Corneja-Pena, however we are also perplexed and disappointed that he was charged only with misdemeanor sexual abuse and allowed to plea out. Victims of crimes he has admitted to committing were followed, targeted, and assaulted sexually in broad daylight and in front of other people. Mr. Corneja-Pena approached his victims from behind on a bicycle, put his hand up their skirts, and rode away. Tellingly, he would also laugh about it while riding away.

Clearly he wanted his victims to feel humiliation and denigration. He not only wanted to gain, he wanted to harm psychologically. Harming psychologically was his intent; similar to a hate crime where the manner of conducting the crime makes it even worse and therefore deserving of a stronger penalty. The victims were presumably humiliated, shocked, and emotionally scarred for life. Sexual assault is a gross violation of the social contract and should not be tolerated in our neighborhood or anywhere else in this city and country. That Mr. Corneja-Pena was allowed to plead guilty to misdemeanor sexual abuse does not provide adequate or complete justice to a community that was so shocked by these incidents.

There was significant local media coverage of these incidents. The Washington Post and several local blogs coined the phrase "the bicycle groper" to identify Mr. Corneja-Pena. According to the news blog Borderstan, "In July, Liz Gorman's post on the Collective Action for Safe Spaces website about being sexually assaulted in Dupont Circle received widespread media attention." Though Mr. Corneja-Pena did not admit guilt in that particular case, the modus operandi is extremely similar. The posting sparked a neighborhood-wide conversation on safety and attitudes toward sexual assault.

Though we cannot speak directly for any member of the community or any of the victims, we feel that the neighborhood was significantly negatively impacted by this rash of assaults and that Mr. Corneja-Pena should be punished to the full extent of the law. We believe that he should serve the maximum sentence allowed by law and that his sentences should be served consecutively as opposed to concurrently.

This man has plead guilty to being a serial sexual abuser who focused on finding victims in our neighborhood. Though he needs and deserves significant psychological assistance, he must also be punished for publicly violating his victims.

We thank you for considering this statement during the sentencing of Mr. Corneja-Pena.

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Noah Smith and Kishan Putta

Dupont Circle ANC Public Safety Liaisons