

Letter to the Editor

We have received a letter to the editor from the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance. Per their mission statement: Temple's Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance is an organization that works to further the values of intersectional feminism within ourselves, within Temple, and within Philadelphia. We stand firmly against oppressive systems such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism, and support movements for LGBTQIA+, disability, environmental, and immigrant justice. We fight these systems with education, action, and community events. We strive to create an accountable space where people can connect with other feminists and discuss their experiences with these systems.



Trigger warning: sexual assault

One out of every five women who attend college will be sexually assaulted. That number is one in four for trans and nonbinary people, and one in sixteen for cis men. Rape is an epidemic on college campuses, and many universities are at least starting to take initiative to protect their students. Even though we have far to go, we are seeing rapists face more and more consequences every day. So why is Temple building monuments honoring the people who support rapists?

In 2005, Andrea Constand filed a civil lawsuit against Bill Cosby for sexually assaulting her. At the time of the sexual assault in 2004, Constand was the director of operations for the Temple's women's basketball team and Cosby was on the Board of Trustees. Constand said in the trial that she saw Cosby as a friend and mentor to her prior to the assault. In January of 2004, Constand visited Cosby's home in Elkins Park to get advice from her mentor. Cosby told her that she needed to relax and gave her some pills, telling her that they were an herbal remedy. Later, Constand awoke to Cosby assaulting her. Since Costand's accusation, dozens of women have accused Cosby of drugging and raping them.

In 2005, Patrick O'Connor represented Bill Cosby in the trial against Andrea Constand. At the time, both O'Connor and Cosby were on the Board of Trustees, in a trial against a Temple employee. O'Connor has also publicly defended Cosby's actions by stating, "[the] defendant admitted to nothing more than being one of the many people who introduced Quaaludes into their consensual sex life in the 1970s," despite the fact that Cosby testified to obtaining the drugs specifically to have sex with young women.¹ Since then, people have begun distancing themselves from the disgraced Bill Cosby. Twenty-five colleges and universities have rescinded his honorary degrees, and television networks have stopped airing Cosby's shows. However, Temple still has relics of his time here, including Patrick O'Connor. O'Connor remains on the Board of Trustees, currently serving as the chair. Despite his connection to the Cosby case, he has not resigned or been removed from the board, showing to Temple students and faculty that defending rapists is okay as long as you have enough money to donate.

For the Temple Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance, the celebration of O'Connor is problematic for a number of reasons. On a very basic level, rape apologists should not be supported or applauded. Everyone deserves a defense attorney, and Cosby is no exception. However, O'Connor chose to take the case, even though it was against a Temple faculty member, an obvious conflict of interest. The fact that a member of the Board of Trustees chose to defend a fellow member against a charge leveled by a Temple faculty member does not suggest to the faculty or to students that if they report being assaulted, they will be supported by the university. Bill Cosby could have afforded any lawyer, but both he and O'Connor chose to let O'Connor defend him. In an [article in Fortune](#), Temple history professor David Watt is quoted as saying, "It's tough for us in the faculty and for the students to tell when he's speaking as a representative of Temple ... or when he's speaking as a zealous advocate for Bill Cosby or when he's speaking just as a private citizen. ... I'm afraid it's made it harder for Temple to send this very clear message ... that giving a person a drug and having sexual relations without her consent is a very serious crime." It is Temple's responsibility to show its students that it has zero tolerance for sexual assault, and celebrating a rape apologist on campus does not do that.

Beyond this insult to survivors of sexual assault, it is also problematic that Patrick O'Connor remains on the Board of Trustees because his position gives him power over the allocation of resources to support survivors of sexual assault. The university lacks the resources, and the coordination of resources, to support survivors. FMLA has been conducting a survey of people's experiences with the resources provided to survivors at Temple, and the responses clearly show a public perception of lack of communication between the different offices and departments. Many people said the resources were not comprehensive, and many more said even when the resources are helpful, they do not coordinate well with each other and it is difficult to access some of them because of long wait times.

In 2014, president Neil Theobald commissioned the Presidential Committee on Campus Sexual Misconduct to recommend ways to make the university more accountable and proactive on sexual assault issues. The committee recommended a stand-alone office where students could access resources to help with their sexual assaults, or what FMLA often refers to as a "sexual assault crisis center." Those recommendations have yet to be implemented. Temple has been under investigation for Title IX violations a few times, and is not listening to the recommendations made by students and faculty. It is made especially difficult when resources are not allocated to organizations that support survivors, like Tuttleman Counseling and the Title IX Coordinator. This is all under control of the Board of Trustees. While Patrick O'Connor's presence on the Board is a metaphorical insult to survivors, it also realistically prevents survivors from getting resources.

¹ <http://fortune.com/2015/07/22/bill-cosby-lawyer-patrick-oconnor-temple/>

Temple needs to show survivors of sexual assault that they are prioritized, and the university can start by listening to the Presidential Committee on Campus Sexual Misconduct's recommendation for resources. It is also vital that Temple shows students that survivors are supported by not honoring rape apologists. Temple FMLA is committed to supporting survivors of sexual assault and holding the university accountable to its students. We are calling for the university to create more resources for victims of sexual assault, including a centralized sexual assault crisis center. We also demand that Temple remove Patrick O'Connor from the Board of Trustees and his name from O'Connor Plaza. We will take action to ensure these demands are met and the university is accountable to its students and faculty. If you would like to get involved in the campaign, please email templefmla@gmail.com.