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Tony Simmons Sentenced to Four Years in Prison Women's Rights Advocates Celebrate Justice for Young Victims

New York, NY—Tony Simmons—a juvenile court guard convicted of molesting two girls in juvenile detention— was sentenced by Judge Carol Berkman to four years in prison and ten years probation on multiple counts of committing a Criminal Sexual Act and Sexual Abuse. The judge noted that both the girls' young ages and the position of Tony Simmons as an employee of the Department of Juvenile Justice entrusted with their care warranted a sentence in the maximum range.

NOW-NYC Executive Director, Sonia Ossorio called the news a victory for all survivors of sexual assault, saying: "An attacker who was set to get a slap on the wrist will now be serving four years in prison, largely because our community of women's rights organizations and anti-violence advocates demanded that rape be taken seriously."

Just this past November, Simmons had been days away from finalizing a plea deal of probation with no jail time for sexually assaulting three girls in his custody in the Manhattan Family Court Building. After an overwhelming community outcry against the lenient sentence led by the New York City chapter of the National Organization for Women, Judge Cassandra Mullen changed her offer to 3 years in state prison. Simmons chose to face trial, and on January 21st, Simmons was found guilty by a jury of his peers on 12 of the 14 counts against him: Criminal Sexual Act in the Third Degree (a class E felony, two counts), Sexual Abuse in the Second Degree (a class A misdemeanor, five counts), and Sexual Abuse in the Third Degree (a class B misdemeanor, five counts).

Ossorio points out, "He almost got away with it. Simmons targeted these girls precisely because he thought they were not in a position to stand up for themselves and that no one would believe them. Today, he was proven wrong."

In response to this egregious case and the initial offer of probation for a confessed rapist, NOW-NYC launched a "Take Rape Seriously" campaign to turn up the pressure on the criminal justice system in New York. Nearly 18% of women in the U.S. have survived a completed or attempted rape. It's estimated that only 39% of rapes are reported nationwide and only 6% of rapists will spend any time in prison.

"There is an epidemic of abuse happening to our most vulnerable kids, those in the juvenile justice system. One in eight detained youth has been sexually abused according to a report by the Department of Justice. Predators like Tony Simmons think these kids don't matter to society," said Ossorio.

The National Organization for Women is the nation's largest organization working to advance women's rights and improve women's lives. The New York City Chapter of NOW, founded in 1966, is the largest chapter in the country with 5,000 members locally and 35,000 statewide. NOW-NYC works to promote women's reproductive rights, secure women's economic empowerment, and end violence and discrimination against women.

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