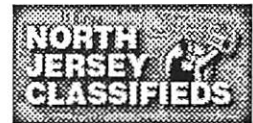
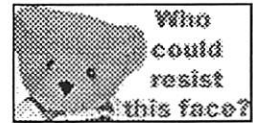




T O D A Y ' S N E W S

State lawmakers urge redefining of sex crime

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By ROBERT GEBELOFF
Staff Writer

With some of New Jersey's most serious sex crimes going uncounted in official police crime rates, state officials on Wednesday called for reforms in police reporting procedures.

A state police spokesman, in turn, said the agency would consider adding a wider array of sex crimes to those figures.

Hundreds of sex crimes that police refer to authorities for prosecution are excluded from crime counts because they fail to meet the narrow definition of rape created by the FBI and followed by New Jersey State Police, a computer analysis published in The Record this week found.

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In response, a key legislator on Thursday called for the state to adopt a new reporting system, while another asked for hearings.

"We need a more modern approach to the reporting of crimes," said Assemblywoman Rose Marie Heck, R-Hasbrouck Heights, who has recently sponsored several bills dealing with violence against women. "If we don't see the crimes in print, then we're going to think they're not happening anymore."

Heck said she plans on calling for hearings into the matter.

Meanwhile, state Sen. Louis Kosco, R-Paramus, chairman of the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee, said he would push for a new crime-reporting system.

Though the narrow definition of rape was created by the FBI, federal justice officials have urged states for years to adopt a reporting system that counts a wider variety of crimes. Earlier this decade, the federal government made \$27 million available for states to study alternative systems, but New Jersey police say a federally funded \$350,000 pilot project failed.

"I'm going to propose within the next year that we get on board" with the new system, Kosco said.

Kosco said he is sympathetic to the police complaints about the new federal system. He agreed that officers should spend their time catching criminals instead of compiling detailed reports.

However, he said, "That should not stand in the way of us having the right statistics to be made available to the people who are dealing with these problems."

State police are not in favor of a full-blown statewide change in crime reporting, state police spokesman John Hagerty said Wednesday. An overhaul isn't likely, he said.

Yet when asked whether it is fair that sex crimes against women are counted while crimes against men are not, Hagerty said it is possible that the official definition of rape would be changed.

"The state police are looking to expand the definition of rape," he said.

Victims' rights supporters have complained that excluding certain types of crimes puts a stigma on victims of those crimes.

Broadening the definition would be a welcome change, said Richard Pompelio, a victims advocate from Sparta. "That would help a lot of people," Pompelio said.

While all kinds of sex crimes are tracked by state police, only a limited subset are counted when police tabulate the crime rate for a community.

The crime rate, which is a key measure of community safety, consists of seven "index" offenses: murder, rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny, and vehicle theft.

But state police guidelines, based on federal guidelines set down 70 years ago, dictate that

rape only is counted when the victim is female and the crime involves genital-to-genital contact.

Incidents in which the victim is male or which don't involve intercourse -- as well as several other types of offenses -- are tracked but excluded from the crime rate.

The Record study of data for 91 North Jersey communities found hundreds of sex crimes that didn't make it into the crime rate. These included incidents in which police were seeking to charge defendants with first- or second-degree crimes.

In 26 communities, police had referred at least one sex crime for prosecution in 1996 and 1997, yet no rapes were listed in Uniform Crime Reports.

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