



# The Financial Cost Of School Violence

(New York-WABC, February 4, 2002) — In tonight's Eyewitness News Extra: The financial cost of school violence. We know the emotional cost. We saw it at the New York high school shooting three weeks ago, in which two students were wounded and hundreds were left worried about returning to campus. But there's also a financial cost: Millions spent on lawsuits, instead of school security. Education Reporter Celeste Ford has more.

Last month's shooting at Martin Luther King Jr. High School once again brought school security to the forefront. The incident reminded the city that unsafe schools are expensive in both human and monetary terms. Each year, school violence costs the city millions of dollars in civil suits.

Andre Napper says the last thing he expected was to be shot by another student inside MLK High School.

Andre Napper, NYC Student: "I ran down from the fourth to the second, looking for security. I didn't find security. Ran into the main office. They thought I was playing, kicked me out of the office."

The bullet is still lodged near Napper's spine. His family is seeking \$10 million in damages from the city. Meanwhile, in Brooklyn, another family has also filed a claim against the city. They want compensation for the fractured foot and ankle suffered when their 13 year-old was pushed down a school stairwell.

Dominick Adams, NYC Student: "They pushed me up a little bit, then they shoved me."

Celeste Ford, Eyewitness News: "They pushed you down the stairs?"

Adams: "Yes."

Ford: "And what did they say when they were doing this?"

Adams: "They just started laughing, said 'Get him,' and they were chasing me."

Dominick Adams says the school ignored him when he repeatedly complained about threats from gang members.

These are just a few examples of the monetary cost of violence in New York City's schools. During each of the past three years, an average 419 civil suits were filed against the city for violent incidents in the schools. Those suits really add up. During the past five years, the city resolved a fraction of the claims, and paid out more than \$19 million in settlements and judgments.

Alan Hevesi, Former NYC Controller: "What we really should be doing is, instead of paying out in claims, reduce the number of claims by putting in security systems in the schools which have the greatest frequency of incidents."

Former City Controller Alan Hevesi looked into the issue last year, and called for modern security systems, especially cameras. Lawmakers demanded the same after the MLK High School shooting.

Newark has already made that investment, at a cost of roughly \$100,000 per high school.

Willie Freeman, School Security Director: "When you look at it and what the liability would be to the school itself, or the district, it's very little money."

Freeman, the head of school security says the district saves money on civil suits, vandalism and theft. East Side High School has more than 70 digital cameras. A security guard monitors them and administrators throughout the school system can watch on their computers. Magnetic locks sound an alarm in the school office if someone tries to leave, or enter, through the wrong door. The school also has metal detectors and photo ID cards.

Keith Santos, Newark Student: "Now we can just worry about school work instead of worrying about fights or who's going to get stabbed, who's going to get jumped."

In Manhattan, Park West High School is one of 60 city schools with metal detectors and photo IDs, plus a team of 13 school security agents. But is that enough?

Frank Brancato, Park West High School Principal: "We need to get the highest state of the art stuff, so that anyone trying to sneak something in, wherever, will be caught."

And Andrei Napper wants reassurance.

Napper: "I'm never going to feel as comfortable as I had in the past."

The Board of Ed spends \$128 million on school security every year. Now it's installing security cameras at Martin Luther King Jr. High School. For the rest of the system, a spokesman for the board says the chancellor and the police commissioner are working together to develop a better strategy.

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**FYI**

**Campus Crime: Colleges & Universities**

- In the 102nd Congress of the United States, two Acts were passed to protect college students -- the *Student Right to Know Act* and the *Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights*. (*Student Right to Know Act, 1991; Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights Amendment to the Higher Education Re-authorization Act, 1992*).
- Over half of all sexual assaults on college campuses involve alcohol abuse. (*Towson State University Campus Violence Prevention Center, 1991*.)
- Twenty-two percent (22%) of all rape victims are between the usual college ages of 18 - 24 years of age. (*National Center for Victims of Crime & Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992*).

**Overview**

The absence of immediate oversight by parents and caretakers offers college students the freedom to make choices, develop personally and experiment. While these are natural and necessary components of maturation, they also create an environment susceptible to crime and victimization. Incidents of drug and alcohol abuse, sexual assault and hate crimes are common on today's college campuses.

Many youths experiment with alcohol and other drugs in their dormitories or at college parties. While underage consumption of alcohol or drugs is illegal, but not violent in nature, violence is often the result of such consumption. In fact, studies indicate that over half of all rapes on college campuses involve alcohol (*Towson State University Campus Violence Prevention Center, 1991*).

The fastest growing population of rape victims is among students. Four out of five of all rapes are committed by acquaintances (*National Center for Victims of Crime & Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center, 1992*). Often considered "covered-up" crimes, rapists on college campuses have rarely been prosecuted. This is because many victims are discouraged by college authorities from reporting crimes to local law enforcement agencies and encouraged instead to file complaints only with the campus justice systems. This practice protects the reputation of the school, but may increase the impact and consequences of the crime on the victim, who is often forced to continue living in the same facility as the perpetrator with little or no sense of justice done or punishment imposed.

Congress addressed this problem through two measures -- the *Student Right to Know Act of 1991*, which requires college and universities to track crimes on campus and to report them to local police, and the *Campus Sexual Assault Victims' Bill of Rights of 1992*, which provides criminal justice remedies for victims of sexual assault.

While fraternities promote self-improvement, they can also present an environment which promulgates negative stereotypes, dangerous attitudes, and abuse of alcohol and/or other drugs. The result is that more college gang rapes occur at fraternity chapter houses than any other college location. Acquaintance rapes occasionally occur during or after fraternity parties.

In addition to sexual crimes, some fraternity or sorority members abuse or attack pledges or other members under the guise of hazing. The absence of dorm advisors or house supervisors exacerbates the problem -- combining little or no supervision with new-found freedoms.

From swastikas painted on doors and threatening telephone calls to violent personal attacks, the prevalence of hate crimes is increasing on college campuses. Colleges endeavor to assemble diverse student bodies and, for many students, this is their first true interaction with people of different cultural, religious, racial and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as different sexual orientations. When tolerance is challenged,

violent expressions of contempt can result.

### **Institutional Response to Campus Crime**

Many colleges and universities are rapidly becoming more concerned about the safety of their students. This has resulted from an increased awareness of the prevalence of campus crime, lawsuits against institutions for *failure to protect*, and pressure from students and college communities. Many schools are increasing lighting around campuses, enhancing security through better security equipment and more security officers, and establishing student crime-watch groups.

Students and colleges are also improving institutional responses to crime through measures such as:

- Establishing a cooperative response and action with local law enforcement;
- Providing support groups and counseling for victims;
- Promoting crime awareness and personal protection campaigns; and
- Developing stronger rules and regulations.

Yet more *must* be done to change behavior, and success can *only* be achieved through the combined efforts of students, parents, faculty, administration, communities and lawmakers.

### **When Students Become Crime Victims**

Victims are encouraged to report the crime to authorities for many reasons, including:

- Many of the crime victim compensation programs (the governmental agencies that provide financial assistance to victims for aid in their physical and emotional recovery from violent crime) require immediate reporting to police;
- Statistics show that crimes reported sooner rather than later have higher arrest rates; and
- Authorities may be able to direct victims to further assistance.

Please note that although all crime victims are encouraged to report the crime, not everyone will feel comfortable entering the criminal justice process. The choice about whether or not to report belongs *to the victim*. Reporting is not required to receive crisis counseling or medical care.

Depending on the location of the crime (whether on or off campus), and any special circumstances surrounding the crime, campus crime victims may report an incident of crime to:

- Campus police;
- Local police;

- Resident hall advisors or, in the case of fraternity/sorority organizations, alumni advisors;
- Crisis or counseling centers; and/or
- Local or state victim assistance programs.

Because being a crime victim can be both physically and psychologically traumatic in the short and long term, many victims seek the support of professionals throughout their recovery. Professional assistance, or referrals for assistance, may be available through the following resources:

- Campus residence hall staff;
- On/off campus crisis centers;
- School counseling services;
- Victim assistance programs;
- Community mental health agencies (check local telephone listings); and/or
- The National Center for Victims of Crime's *FYI* program (1-800-FYI-CALL).

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## **Lawsuits claim Benedict unsafe**

**Mother of slain student says school failed to protect her son; others make similar accusations**  
 By CLIF LeBLANC  
 Staff Writer

The mother of a Benedict College student gunned down in January 2001 during a drug turf war has sued the school for negligence.

The college failed to protect her son, Philip Lee Jr., who came to Benedict from New Jersey to get away from crime and play football, Deborah Lee's wrongful death lawsuit says .

Lee, a nurse in Plainfield, N.J., is seeking actual and punitive damages. The suit does not say how much she wants .

At least two other lawsuits filed in Richland County claim Benedict has a climate of lawlessness that exposes students to injury.

Benedict is not responsible for Lee's death, campus spokeswoman Kymm Hunter said.

"I understand the pain of the family. They have the right to sue," Hunter said. "But I don't think the school is responsible for that unfortunate situation. Benedict has a very safe campus."

Lee's suit, filed Aug. 20, says Benedict "has had a history of criminal conduct and violence."

A campus security officer had seen "suspicious-looking gang members" standing around the

Haskell Street dormitory where Lee was shot in the back of the head, the suit states.

No one investigated the officer's report, the suit states.

Stephen Suggs, Lee's attorney, said his firm's investigation turned up several students and former students who said the school had not done a good job of keeping troublemakers off campus or of making the campus safe.

Many of the points made in Lee's suit mirror complaints investigated by the State Law Enforcement Division during a 10-month investigation that ended in March 2001.

Campus police officers told SLED that senior administrators had a selective arrest policy that protected students instead of having them face prosecution.

Some students said they were intimidated by violators who stayed in school when crimes were treated as campus disciplinary infractions, a campus safety survey found.

No administrator was charged, largely because school officials wouldn't talk to SLED investigators, chief prosecutor Barney Giese said.

Giese said he gave President David Swinton and other administrators the benefit of the doubt.

A separate suit filed last September says Benedict baseball player Shondell Ricks' career was shattered when he was shot during a robbery Nov. 8, 2000, at Haskell dorm.

Ricks' suit says the school ignored two "urgent" repair orders for a broken lock on a first-floor dorm door.

Benedict knew the suspect had been seen in the dorm area and was wanted for other crimes, said Amy Gaffney, Ricks' lawyer, citing a wanted poster the college circulated after the holdup.

The suspect had sneaked into the dorm with other students, Hunter said.

"We have tried to do everything we can do to make students safe. We're between two housing projects and people want to forget that."

A 1997 suit said Benedict should have done more to keep an armed student from another school out of a dorm where Ronald Flowers was shot.

Flowers sued Benedict because a side door in Stuart Hall did not close properly, allowing the gunman in.

The gunman, who had argued earlier with Flowers, chased him and shot Flowers in the buttocks.