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Ms. Leslie A. Roberts
18644 Oak Drive
Detroit, Michigan 48221

January 11, 1980

Mr. Walter Douglass, Chairman
Detroit Board Of Police Commissioners
1300 Beaubien
Detroit, Michigan 48226

Dear Mr. Douglas:

As a black woman, concerned citizen of the city of Detroit, and as a member of the Minority Anti-Rape Task Force, Inc., I would like to express my objections to the policy of giving lie detector tests to rape victims under any circumstances. There is no significant difference in the numbers of false reports for the crime of rape than any other crimes. Yet the 1978 statistics show a significant difference in the numbers of lie detector tests given to victims of rape, and victims of other crimes. This clearly reflects discrimination against women. Further, statistics demonstrate that minority women show a higher tendency to report the crime of rape and are particularly vulnerable to such assaults in urban areas. The policy of reserving lie detector tests particularly for victims of sexual assault reflects both institutional sexism and racism in the context of our city where most reports come from black females.

As a former counselor at the Detroit Rape Counseling Center for a period of two years, I would like to express my objections to this policy and share my observations of the results of such a practice. We have all grown up with many myths about rape. The woman invites rape and is at fault, women lie to get revenge, attention or avoid an argument with her husband or boyfriend, are just two of several myths. Yet many rape victims, professionals, lay people, police, and legal personnel still cling to these myths despite objective facts.

A victim's reactions to sexual assault range from fear and anger to guilt, shame and confusion. Many of these feelings are based on myths she held prior to the assault. An officer or prosecutor who requests that she takes a lie detector test reinforces those feelings and deepens the emotional crisis she is already experiencing. Due to scheduling problems she will have to wait at least a month before the test. In the meantime the rapist is free and the victim's fear becomes paranoia. If she feels guilty due to prior beliefs that women provoke the attack, the lie detector request reinforces those feelings. My observations have been that such a request reinforces the victim's belief that the police don't want to do anything about rape and she carries that belief back to her community. Already in that community are many women who would never consider reporting a rape or didn't in the past for fear of disbelief and ridicule by the police and criminal justice system.

Therefore my objections to this policy rest in the institutional racism and sexism reflected in the practice. In addition, as a former rape counselor I have seen many women become cynical about police and court as a result of this policy. Most importantly, the emotional recovery of the victim is often seriously hindered by this practice

Sincerely,
Leslie A. Roberts
(Ms.) Leslie A. Roberts