

## We Fought for our Education

My name is Charlotte Smalls and I am a Clinical Director in the juvenile justice field. My sister was harassed for almost two years by a star athlete at our Oregon high school before he raped her during a girls' basketball game the week before Christmas vacation. My sister was terrified after her rapist threatened her life, so she reported the assault to the school. Nevertheless, the school sent her to the same lunch period with the assailant and then



failed to protect her. That same day she was beaten up at school by a female friend of the rapist. Both my sister and I endured threats. We stayed out of school the rest of that week, and when we tried to return after vacation it was too dangerous to continue going to school. My sister struggled a great deal as a result of the assault. When we tried to get an education, the school's response created a living hell. The school even retaliated against staff who tried to support our family.

No one ever mentioned our Title IX rights that were violated when the school protected the rapist, but not my sister or me. We had no alternative but to study at home. The star basketball assailant was only suspended for 1 or 2 weeks, even though there was forensic evidence that he raped my sister. The girl who beat up my sister was expelled. The rapist is the one who should have been expelled, and the girl who beat up my sister temporarily suspended.

My mother, who worked for this same school district, fought a two-year court battle to make sure my sister and I continued to receive an education at home and to hold the assailant accountable for his terrible actions. In the end, my mother won the civil court case, but together, my sister and I lost our right to attend four years' of high school, to participate in extracurricular activities, and to graduate with our class. My sister and I picked up our high school diplomas from a lawyer's office.

We were fortunate that our mother could fight for our rights, but we could have easily ended up as high school dropouts and suffered the consequences for the rest of our lives. As it is, we lost so much because our school failed us. I want all students to know their rights, to reach out to adults and organizations that will help them, and to change the culture that allows sexual harassment and violence to continue.

Read more personal accounts of K-12 sexual assault on the Stop Sexual Assault in Schools website: [Share Your Story](#).