

Stronger Penalties for Sexual Extortion Resulting in Suicide or Bodily Injury

Act 75 of 2022

Before breaking for summer, the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed HB 2271, or *Lindsey's Law* (K. Tomlinson). Lindsey Piccone was a victim of sexual extortion in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. She committed suicide a day after being sexually extorted and threatened on SnapChat. Signed into law on July 11, 2022 by Governor Wolf, Act 75 of 2022 enhances sentencing in cases of sexual extortion, where the victim suffers serious bodily injury due to a suicide attempt or dies by suicide after being extorted.



This new law makes the following changes to Pennsylvania's Sexual Extortion statute:

- Under sentencing, "The Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing, in accordance with 42 Pa.C.S § 2154 (relating to adoption of guidelines for sentencing), shall provide for a sentence enhancement within its guidelines for an offense under this section when: the complainant attempts suicide resulting in serious bodily injury or dies by suicide, within 90 days of the commission of the offense, as a proximate result of the trauma that the complainant experienced during of following the comission of the offense."
- Enhanced sentencing was already established in the original statute, in cases of sexual extortion against a minor victim, a victim with an intellectual disability, or when sexual extortion was committed by a person in a position of trust or supervisory or disciplinary power over the victim by way of their legal, professional, or occupational status.
- Enhanced sentencing constitutes a felony of the third degree, as opposed to other crimes of sexual extortion constituting a misdemeanor of the first degree.

About Sexual Extortion

Sexual extortion occurs online or in person, when a person coerces a victim into providing sexual acts, images, or videos to either avoid harm or to receive a thing of value or service. We most often hear of sexual extortion occurring online, such as in Lindsey's case. However, sexual extortion happens in person also. Individuals sexually extort victims in workplaces, schools, healthcare settings, private residences and other settings. Perpetrators of sexual extortion demand sexual acts, images, or videos in exchange for a thing of value (such as a promotion, a better grade, medicine, housing) or to avoid physical or reputational harm. Offenders may obtain or coerce photos or images from a victim and then threaten the victim and demand additional images, acts, or money. Children and young adults are particularly vulnerable to sexual extortion during this growing digital age. Act 75 seeks to prevent and address sexual extortion.