



‘I was going to die’ — Woman accuses NJ firefighter of sadistic rape

Sergio Bichao

Vin Ebenau/Townsquare Media

May 4, 2019

Ashley Stanfield says she was raped by John Syers Jr.

TOMS RIVER — A woman who says she was tied up, tortured and raped by an Ocean County Fire Academy instructor identified herself in public on Friday, calling on prosecutors to carefully review her case and bring felony charges against her accused rapist.

“My name is Ashley Stanfield. I’m a survivor of sexual abuse,” the woman said during a news conference a week after [filing a lawsuit in U.S. District Court that publicly revealed her accusations against John Syers Jr.](#), who works as a firefighter in Elizabeth.

Stanfield repeated the claims in her legal complaint, saying that she visited Syers on Sept. 26 to see the renovations at his Forked River home and that he handcuffed and tied her, choked her with a belt until she passed out and beat and sodomized her despite her protests and cries for help.

Through his attorney, Syers last week denied the allegations, calling them “absurd.”

Syers is facing Municipal Court complaints of assault and lewdness and a Family Court judge signed a restraining order against him. But he has not been charged with sexual assault, a crime that prosecutors would eventually have to bring before a grand jury.

On Friday, Stanfield and her attorney said prosecutors are still waiting for the State Police to release a forensic analysis on a rape kit examination that Stanfield underwent at the hospital after she reported the rape the following day.

“I have put my faith in the justice system. I am imploring that my case be reviewed further,” she said Friday.

Syers’ lawyer last week said that he passed a lie detector test and that he has “text messages, Snapchat photos and other evidence sent by the accuser to Mr. Syers, which discredited her accusations.”

Stanfield, however, says that investigators with the Ocean County Prosecutor’s Office downloaded a copy of the data on her phone and that they recorded a conversation between Stanfield and Syers in which she says he admitted engaging in nonconsensual sex.

“He admitted that he got caught up in his own world,” she said. “He never denied torturing me.”

Stanfield acknowledged that she and Syers had a brief consensual affair even though she was married. But she said their relationship never took off because Syers began seeing someone else and she rebuffed his advances when he tried to rekindle it. She said that on the morning of Sept. 26, she “forcefully, verbally objected to” his advances and “I said no.”

“I was then treated as if my life was less important than his own sexual gratification,” she said Friday. “To him I wasn’t a person. I was nothing more than an object. The more pain and humiliation he inflicted upon me the more he seemed to be aroused and enjoy himself.”

She said she “fought with everything I had,” but he “tortured and defiled my body and my mind.”

“It was the most excruciating and dehumanizing 46 minutes of my life,” she said.

Red marks from choking during an alleged sexual attack on Ashley Stanfield (Robert Fuggi)
Red marks from rope made during an alleged sexual attack on Ashley Stanfield (Robert Fuggi)

At one point, she said, Syers tightened a belt around her neck as she yelped for help, saying that she “accepted the fate that I was going to die, a feeling so sinister that it is indescribable. “

She said her vision became blurred and she lost her sense of hearing as she passed out.

“My last thought was that I was never going to wake up,” she said.

She said she awoke to him hitting her and asked him why he would knock her out. She said he told her: “That’s the best part.”

In the months since the attack, she says she has suffered with severe anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

“My life was shattered that day and I am learning how to pick up the pieces.”

She said the news conference and the lawsuit are not a “smear campaign,” pointing out that she did not publicly reveal the accusations against Syers when she filed the charges against him in Lacey Municipal Court in January or after she secured the restraining order in February.

Her attorney, Robert Fuggi, said his client also has asked the Attorney General’s Office to review the case. He said county prosecutors are not through because they need the forensic evidence.

“I don’t think it’s over,” Fuggi said. “I’m hoping they’ll look at this more carefully.”

The prosecutor’s office does not comment on investigations.

On Friday, Stanfield read from her statement in a calm voice. Her husband was not with her, but Fuggi said that “he’s very supportive of her and they are still together.”

Stanfield said that coming forward has jeopardized “my reputation with the community and marriage.”

“It happens to a lot of other men and women and I didn’t have to come forward but I wanted to,” she said. “We shouldn’t be ashamed of the things that happen to us, as difficult as they are to speak about.”