



Rope marks from an alleged sexual attack (Robert Fuggi)

## Firefighter says she was raped, burned, tortured — Instructor calls it lies

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TOMS RIVER — An aspiring firefighter says an Ocean County Fire Academy instructor tied, blindfolded, burned and brutally raped her to the point that she passed out, thinking that he was going to kill her.

And the 26-year-old woman's lawsuit says that despite evidence of her injuries and the instructor's admission in a recorded phone call that he was "100% wrong," authorities have not charged him with rape.

[UPDATE: Accuser comes forward, asks prosecutors to review case](#)

An attorney for John Syers Jr., however, is calling the woman's accusations "false and absurd" and said that prosecutors in Ocean County declined to charge him with felonies after he passed a

lie-detector test and produced "text messages, Snapchat photos and other evidence sent by the accuser to Mr. Syers, which discredited her accusations."

While Syers has not been charged with felony offenses, he was charged on Jan. 29 by Lacey police with misdemeanor assault and lewdness. The complaints that police filed describe a violent sexual attack.

A Family Court judge on Feb. 21 also signed a final restraining order against Syers, barring him from contacting his accuser at home or work or at the Seaside Heights Fire Department. The order, a copy of which the woman's attorney included with the lawsuit, also prevents him from possessing any firearms or weapons. Syers also was ordered by the judge to be fingerprinted and pay a \$100 civil penalty.

According to the police summonses, the woman — whose name is redacted and appears as initials in her lawsuit — says she arrived at Syers' Forked River home about 9:45 a.m. on Sept. 26. The lawsuit says she was at his house on the morning of the alleged rape because he had invited her over to see his newly constructed home.

The complaint says the two kissed until "she pulled away and withdrew consent for any further sexual contact."

The municipal court complaints then say that Syers "proceeded to handcuff the complainant (and) tie her to the bed with rope" even though he "heard her say 'no.'"

"(Syers) undressed and forced himself onto (her) with vaginal, oral and anal penetration. Defendant smacked (her) across the face numerous time(s), burned her back with a hot unknown substance, struck her tailbone resulting in a spinal injury and struck her body in multiple places leaving visible signs of trauma to her arms, neck, legs, buttocks and face," the municipal court complaint says.

The charges filed by police also say that Syers pulled hair from her head as he finished the assault.

Only when he was done was the woman able to untie herself, her lawsuit says.

The charges prompted an investigation by prosecutors during which the woman agreed to a "phone intercept" in October, allowing investigators to record her calls with Syers, according to her lawsuit filed in U.S. District Court of New Jersey.

The lawsuit says Syers admitted during the recorded phone conversation that he heard her say "no" during their encounter and said that he was "100% wrong."

A spokesman for the Ocean County Prosecutor's Office said Monday his office was involved because of the allegation of sexual assault, and could not comment further. The Lacey Municipal Court declined to provide a reporter any information about the case unless a records request was made in writing.



Attorney Richard Lomurro on Sunday called the lawsuit "the latest of a continuing effort by the accuser to smear Mr. Syers's reputation and advance a vindictive agenda.

"Mr. Syers has refused to back down and will continue to fight these lies and prove his innocence," Lomurro said in a statement released after several news organizations had reported on this lawsuit.

"(The accuser) is using the apparent civil suit, which has not been served on our client, as yet another attempt to try and force her vindictive agenda and intimidate our client. It is telling that the law suit was given to the press before it was even served on Mr. Syers. He had no knowledge of the lawsuit until these articles arose," Lomurro wrote.

The woman's attorney, Robert Fuggi, said he believes the charges will be upgraded now that the lawsuit has brought her accusations to the public for the first time.

The lawsuit faults Syers as well as the county government, the Ocean County Fire and First Aid Training Center and the Ocean County Fire Academy, which still lists Syers as an instructor. A county spokeswoman referred questions from a reporter to the prosecutor.

The lawsuit goes into more detail than the police summonses.

The woman's lawsuit says Syers had pursued her during her time at the academy.

It says the alleged rape lasted about 45 minutes, although at one point the lawsuit says she passed out and doesn't know for how long she was unconscious.

According to the civil complaint, she was blindfolded and couldn't see what Syers was putting on her back that was burning.

She also says in the lawsuit he took a belt and wrapped it around her neck, leading her to "the realization that (Syers) may kill her during this rape."

She says he choked her until she couldn't scream and "felt all her senses fading." She says her "ability to hear started slipping away from her, her vision blurred and then faded to black. At this moment (she) accepted the fact that she was going to die. (She) then blacked out."

She woke up to Syers smacking her face, the lawsuit says.

The lawsuit says she had placed her phone down somewhere and considered calling 911 through voice command during the alleged rape, but she was worried about angering Syers even further.

After he was done, the lawsuit says he told her: "This is your punishment for making me wait," an apparent reference to her breaking their plans to meet a week earlier.

The lawsuit says that after raping her, Syers asked if she was OK. She says she told him she wasn't.

"Well, I could tell you were pretty freaked out. I'm sorry. I'll have to make it up to you next time with dinner and a movie," the lawsuit alleges he told her.

Red marks from rope made during an alleged sexual attack (Robert Fuggi)

The woman says in her lawsuit Syers asked her if she wanted to shower but she got dressed and went home.

The lawsuit says she took pictures of her injuries — which are included as exhibits in the lawsuit — and bagged her clothing as evidence.

On the next day, she says in the lawsuit, she went to Community Medical Center in Toms River and underwent a rape kit examination and spoke to a prosecutor's investigator. A forensic nurse examiner discharge form provided by her attorney is dated Sept. 28. The form says that her examination was to collect evidence of sexual assault. It says she was prescribed antibiotics to prevent infections and emergency contraceptives.

She filed charges with Lacey police on Sept. 29.

The lawsuit says Syers continued to contact her via text and Snapchat but she never opened the messages to read them.

The woman says she escaped from a fire that erupted in her condominium in May 2017. She says she was inspired to become a firefighter so she could help others.