


# Officials Who Claim to Support Victim Rights Go On Offensive To Silence Outspoken Victim Advocate

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When the leaders of several agencies meet later this month in Phoenix to recognize National Crime Victims' Rights (NCVR) Week, the one person who will not appear on stage is the event's recently disinvited keynote speaker, victim advocate Kayleigh Kozak.

Kozak is the Kayleigh behind Kayleigh's Law signed by then-Gov. Doug Ducey in 2021 to make it possible for survivors of sexual and domestic abuse to obtain a lifetime no-contact order against their assailants.

In January, Kozak was contacted by the committee organizing the April 25 awards event honoring the outstanding achievements and tireless efforts of those serving victims of crime in Arizona. She agreed to serve as keynote speaker for the event with its theme of "Survivor Voices: Elevate. Engage. Effect Change."

But Kozak saw that invitation formally revoked last week by Shawn Cox, a member of the event committee. Cox is head of the Victims' Services Division within the Maricopa County Attorney's Office.

If anyone from the committee thought Kozak would run and hide, they misjudged the lessons she has learned as a sex abuse survivor.

"I will not stay silent," she said.

Cox, apparently unaware of the irony, advised Kozak that the awards event committee was troubled by Kozak's use of her voice as a crime victim to decry Gov. Katie Hobbs' veto of Senate Bill 1253. The bill sought to strengthen the community notification process involving registered sex offenders.

Governor Hobbs has officially vetoed SB1253 which require a registered sex offender with parental rights to notify their children's school of their sex offender status. I am disgusted.

Thank you [@AZSenatorShamp](https://twitter.com/AZSenatorShamp) for fighting this fight with me. [pic.twitter.com/csJFKtKE7t](https://pic.twitter.com/csJFKtKE7t)

— thekayleighkozak (@Kayleigh\_Kozak) [April 6, 2023](https://twitter.com/Kayleigh_Kozak/status/1645123456)

Another tweet by Kozak read, "I am just disgusted by the Governors decision & lack of understanding of this bill. It is beyond shameful, she is in fact prioritizing pedophiles over innocent children."

Kozak recently spoke at length with Arizona Daily Independent about the last few weeks, starting with her joy that SB1253 made it to Hobbs' desk, to her disdain of the veto, and her disgust with Hobbs' "nonsensical" excuse for the veto.

"It reads as if the governor and her staff don't even know how community notification works," Kozak says in disbelief.

Kozak's comments led to an email and a phone call from Cox who withdrew the keynote speaker invitation. During those communications, Kozak says Cox told her the committee was "concerned" with having Kozak on stage during the event which celebrates victims' rights.

Cox refused to provide Kozak names for those on the committee who represent Hobbs' office, the Arizona Attorney General's Office, the Arizona Department of Corrections, the Arizona Department of Public Safety, the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections, and the Arizona Criminal Justice Commission.

One person Kozak has not spoken with since the disinvite is Maricopa County Attorney Rachel Mitchell, to whom Cox reports. It is Mitchell who, as a county prosecutor 15 years ago, signed off on a plea deal with the school coach who sexually molested Kozak.

Kozak initially supported Mitchell's run for office but that relationship has soured. Mitchell has not publicly commented on the SB1523 veto, something Kozak has noticed.

For Kozak, she has doubled down on her belief that she is being punished by government officials -elected and bureaucrats- for "having the courage and strength" to speak out against those who prioritize politics over policy.

"The officials I criticized are supposedly 'uncomfortable' with the prospect of sharing a stage with me," Kozak said. "Well these are the same people who claim to support victims' rights, but they didn't hesitate to punish me for using my voice to express my opinion as a victim and survivor."

Kozak's ascent to a well-respected voice for victims grew out of an all-too-familiar tragedy for Arizona's children – that of sexual abuse. Then in September 2022, Kayleigh's Law went into effect, providing certain crime victims the option of

obtaining a special lifetime, no-contact injunction against their convicted assailants that a judge can only dismiss in limited circumstances.

But Kozak, the mother of five, was not ready to rest on that achievement. This legislative session she has been instrumental in four bills, including the vetoed SB1253 introduced by Sen. Janae Shamp.

Another by Shamp, Senate Bill 1284, stems from the fact the majority of sex offenders are ordered to serve lifetime supervised probation but prosecutors and judges in some counties liberally support an early end to probation. SB1284 has passed the Senate but is stalled in the House

awaiting a final vote.

Kozak was also instrumental with the language contained in two Senate bills introduced by Sen. Sinn Kerr. The first, SB1583, seeks to ensure more registered sex offenders are listed on the DPS registry website. It too is stalled in the House.

The second, SB1582, makes technical correction to Kayleigh's Law. The bill is currently on Hobbs' desk after clearing the Legislature without any "no" votes.

If Kozak is worried Hobbs will veto SB1582 as retaliation, she is not showing it. Nor will she stay quiet in an effort to appease the governor or any other government official.

"I have been punished and ostracized for speaking my truth," Kozak said. "They may have silenced me from giving my keynote speech, but I will not allow the governor or anyone else to tell me or any victim to stay silent."

More information about Kozak is available at <https://becauseyoustillmatter.com/>