

City Of Maryville Fearful Of Reprisal

News

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While millions of people nationwide are expressing outrage over alleged cases of sexual assault that reportedly occurred during a teenage house party in Maryville 21 months ago, many folks in this town appear to be experiencing a different emotion. Fear.



For the first time in years, Monday night's City Council meeting took place under the watchful eye of an armed and uniformed policeman.

Looking tired and grim, Mayor Jim Fall opened the session by reading a prepared statement intended to clarify the city's role in the case, which ironically enough considering the onslaught of negative social media aimed City Hall, amounts to almost nothing.

"We will not be responding to any comments or questions related to the significant increase in communications directed toward Maryville, as a community, and its elected officials, both collectively and as individuals, resulting from an article published in the Sunday print edition of The Kansas City Star," Fall said.

"I will be very brief, but very concise, in saying that, neither individually nor collectively, has the Maryville Public Safety Department, or any of its members, been in the past, nor currently, involved in the investigation of the incident or incidents which were the subject of the article."

Fall went on to explain, correctly, that the case was handled by the Nodaway County Sheriff's Office before being handed over to Nodaway County Prosecuting Attorney Robert Rice, who ultimately decided not to prosecute two 17-year-old high school athletes accused of sexually assaulting 14-year-old Daisy Coleman and a second unidentified 13-year-old girl.

Fall's effort to distance the city from the media storm — the story has gone viral both in the United States and overseas — was understandable following what could certainly be construed as threatening comments issued by Anonymous — a shadowy web of activists and Internet hackers who are reportedly mounting protests against the way the case was handled.

On Monday, Anonymous released an online statement in which a digitally produced voice warned Fall and other city officials to "expect us."

Widely disseminated online, the statement continues: "If Maryville won't defend these young girls, if the police are too cowardly or corrupt to do their jobs, if (the) justice system has abandoned them, then we will have to stand for them."

A Facebook post on a site called "Justice For Daisy," which may be Anonymous-related, called for a "peaceful protest" at 10 a.m. Tuesday, Oct. 22, at the Nodaway County Courthouse.

Maryville Public Safety Director Keith Wood said city police are taking the statements seriously and have beefed up the department's patrol presence in an effort to better protect anyone with a connection to the case. Presumably this includes both young people who were at the party, their families and local elected officials.

Wood declined to offer specifics about the effort, but did say his officers were on a heightened security alert with regard to the safety of "a fairly large group of people."

Ensuring adequate security was also a growing concern for Maryville public schools Tuesday morning, where Superintendent Larry Linthacum said an "unconfirmed" threat had been received via Twitter.

Linthacum said he met with staff from all three Maryville schools on Monday, adding that School Resource Officer Josh McMillan, an armed, commissioned policeman, has been "very active" in seeking to identify possible threats.

"We have heightened awareness," Linthacum said, "but we are still going to educate kids today. We're on our toes but also realize that we want to stay positive."

Meanwhile Northwest Missouri State University, where two of the young men implicated in the incident are now student-athletes, attempted to distance itself from the growing controversy as well.

In a statement released Monday evening, university officials stated that, "As the (Kansas City Star) article explains, this incident occurred in January 2012, and none of the individuals allegedly involved were Northwest students at that time.

"Northwest adheres to the requirement to allow all qualified and eligible students to pursue an education and does not discriminate. ... Northwest is committed to creating a safe and supportive campus environment free from harassment and hostility."