



## **2018-18: Babin-Fenske vs Sudbury Star**

April 13, 2018 – *For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has found a complaint against the Sudbury Star to be resolved due to corrective action taken by the news media organization.

The complainant, Jennifer Babin-Fenske, said the February 27, 2018 Sudbury Star story, “Sudbury man gets four years for molesting daughter”, contained explicit detail that was unnecessary to the story and disrespectful to the sensitivity of readers. There was no complaint that the details were inaccurate.

The complainant said the message about rape, sexual assault, and trauma could be conveyed without the graphic details, which she compared to pedophile pornography. While she acknowledged that some detail was removed after her complaint to the editor, she felt insufficient changes were made, and stated concern about future similar reporting.

The Sudbury Star responded to the complainant by agreeing that that the story was too explicit, and that it subsequently modified two sentences in the website version.

The editor also explained the effort in such reporting to strike a balance between conveying “the full horror of such crimes” and respecting the sensitivities of readers. In this case, the paper said, it agreed with the complainant that the original story was too explicit.

While recognizing that sexual assault of children and details of such assault is upsetting, the NNC found reporting is appropriate and necessary for two reasons: to uphold the concept of open courts and to meet the public interest in knowing such crimes occur.

Council acknowledged the conflict between the privacy of the accused, victims and family, and the public’s interest in knowing about crime and child abuse. In this case, there was also a request for consideration of the sensitivity of the reading public, including children. Journalistic judgment including common sense, humanity and relevance is required to balance those competing interests.

Council accepted the news outlet’s statement that some degree of detail is necessary to convey the horror of the crime. At the same time, widely accepted standards require journalists to avoid voyeuristic stories about victims of crime, to give consideration to the humanity of those involved and to consider the relevance of details. Council found the amended version of the article met those standards.

The NNC noted, however, that best practice exercises respect for reader sensitivity by posting a warning of graphic content at the top of a story. The Sudbury Star should use such practice in future.

The complainant suggested the editor did not understand why the article was inappropriate, and was concerned that similar instances will happen in future. The NNC found the news organization’s action to amend the wording indicated that it was responsive to public concern and did recognize when a line was crossed. Regarding the concern about future similar articles, the NNC is not able to take action on future events.