

"I definitely am breathing a sigh of relief. ... Knowing that he is in a confined location where there is no chance of him getting out, at least in the near term, is comforting."

— DONNA PALOMBA, VICTIM OF SEXUAL ASSAULT BY JOHN REGAN IN 1993

Rapist sentenced to N.Y. facility

Still considered a danger after serving time for 1993 assault in city

BY TRACEY O'SHAUGHNESSY
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN

WATERBURY — The city man who broke into a Waterbury woman's bedroom and raped her in 1993 will spend the next years of his life confined and forced to undergo mental health treatment, according to his victim, Donna Palomba.

A New York judge committed John Regan, 66, to a se-

cure treatment facility for sex-crime offenders. New York has two such facilities: Central New York Psychiatric Center in Marcy, N.Y., and St. Lawrence Psychiatric Center in Ogdensburg, N.Y.

The judge signed the order Nov. 28, Palomba said, and a New York investigator called her Wednesday to inform her.

"I definitely am breathing a sigh of relief," she said. "It's been hanging like a cloud for

a number of years now. Knowing that he is in a confined location where there is no chance of him getting out, at least in the near term, is comforting."

Palomba had been waiting for a judge's decision since January, after a jury found Regan suffered from a "mental abnormality" related to a sexual crime and was likely to re-offend. Those conditions meant Regan was subject to

New York's Mental Hygiene Law, or Article 10, that provides a mechanism through which the attorney general can civilly confine sex offenders found to have mental abnormalities. A judge also could have released Regan to "strict and intensive supervision and treatment" under supervision of the N.Y. Division of Parole.

New York is one of 20 states that allows forced civil confinement for recidivistic sex offenders. Connecticut has no such law, Waterbury Mayor Neil M. O'Leary said. The N.Y. Attorney General's office did not respond to three emailed requests for comment.

In 1993, while her husband was out of town and her children slept down the hall, a masked man raped Palomba in her bedroom. She did not know her rapist's identity until 2004, when a DNA match confirmed it was Regan, a family friend.

In 2005, police in Saratoga, N.Y., apprehended Regan after he tried to shove a then-17-year-old track star into a van with a tarp, noose, syringe and sedative inside.

Both crimes were the focus of a "Dateline NBC" episode, "Evil Paid a Visit."

FOR THE LATTER CRIME, Regan was sentenced to 12 years in prison, served concurrently with seven years for assaulting a co-worker in 2004 and 15 years for Palomba's case.

Regan completed his sentence at Clinton Correctional Facility in Dannemora, N.Y., in October 2017. However, on the day of his release, the N.Y. Supreme Court ordered the Department of Correction to keep Regan confined until a hearing could determine whether he should be placed in a secure treatment or psychiatric facility, per Article 10.

Palomba said she believes Regan raped more women, noting N.Y. investigators discovered more victims who testified during Regan's trial last year.

"I believe it started well before it happened to me and continued long after," said Palomba, founder of Jane Doe No More, a nonprofit that empowers survivors of sexual crimes through education, advocacy and prevention.

O'Leary, a former Water-



ASSOCIATED PRESS

John Regan, center, is escorted by Saratoga County (N.Y.) Sheriff deputies from Saratoga County Court on Jan. 6, 2006.

bury police chief, confirmed at least two additional victims testified against Regan, adding he had neither admitted to or apologized for the rape of Palomba.

Since 2007, sex offenders in New York can be involuntarily sentenced to a mental health facility when that person's "judgment is so impaired that he is unable to understand the need for such care and treatment." Such offenders must be found to be at "substantial risk" of violent behavior to themselves or others, according to Article 10.

Less than 3% of cases reviewed by the Office of Mental Health are referred to the N.Y. Attorney General's Office for civil management proceedings, according to the attorney general's website.

More than 6,300 sex offenders nationally are detained in either federal or civil commitment programs in the U.S., according to a 2020 study by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law.

Palomba said her organization would work to lobby for such a provision in Connecticut.

"I'm super grateful that there is this law in existence — anything that can keep dangerous predators con-

fined is really great news," she said. "In coming to know more about the law and how it works, it's a very well-thought-out and important vehicle to be able to keep the worst of the worst offenders from getting out. It's not used often, but when it's necessary, I think it could be incredible."

SEX OFFENDERS IN NEW YORK who are committed may have their cases reviewed annually.

O'Leary, who has long supported Palomba's efforts, said he would welcome such a civil law in Connecticut.

"The problem is people get sentenced for crimes and at some point their sentence is completed, but the issue — any psychological conditions and mental issues that put them in prison in the first place — has not been resolved," he said. "As elected leaders, we all have an obligation to protect the people in the society that we have. If we have a person who is suffering from psychiatric illness, we should try to help that person but also protect the general public if that person is still suffering from whatever psychiatric ailments that caused that offense in the first place."