

insights

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET February 14, 2024 | TTR not mapped yet | Elizabeth G. Myers, Jennifer R. Ecklund

Film on Sexual Assault Survivors' Legal Challenge to Debut at SXSW Festival

Two years ago, Thompson Coburn partners [Elizabeth Myers](#) and [Jennifer Ecklund](#) celebrated the achievement of a [historic settlement](#) for the 15 sexual assault survivors they represented in a federal lawsuit. The lawsuit sparked sweeping changes for the city of Austin, Texas, and paved the way for survivors to fight for meaningful new policies and procedures. Now, Elizabeth and Jenny are ready for an even wider audience to learn about those impactful results through a documentary film premiering at the South by Southwest (SXSW) festival.

The film premiere is the subject of an in-depth profile in The Texas Lawbook, which can be read [here](#).

Director and filmmaker Julie Lunde Lilleaeter reached out to Elizabeth and Jenny years ago after seeing media coverage of the lawsuits, which outlined the failure of police and prosecutors to adequately investigate or prosecute sexual assaults against women. Lilleaeter and her team then began following the stories of several Austin-based survivors as they challenged the system that allowed their rapists to walk free. The filming process also included shadowing Elizabeth and Jenny through their work as the survivors' legal counsel.

The resulting film, "An Army of Women," will be one of eight documentaries worldwide to premiere at SXSW in the Feature Documentary Competition. The [first screening](#) was set for March 8 at the ZACH Theatre, coinciding with International Women's Day, with additional times scheduled March 12 and 15.

Held each March in Austin, SXSW showcases innovative work across creative industries. It is a high-profile platform that will give the documentary a global showcase to debut its important message.

"The film focuses on forcing change," Elizabeth said. Although the fight against the system presented many challenges for the women who were assaulted, "having lawyers willing to stand up for them even when facing difficult odds can have a transformative effect on their lives. It was a product of them pushing, plus us standing with them in court." With the support of Jenny and Elizabeth, the clients became activists for themselves.

In addition to leading to significant changes, the film raises awareness of how rarely sexual assault cases are prosecuted. "It is a call to do more. We often believe men when they say they're attacked, but not women," Jenny said. The film "advances what we were hoping to advance."



The documentary also highlights the personal relationship between Elizabeth and Jenny and their journey to marriage amidst the fight for justice for their clients.

Before the premiere of the film in March, the City of Austin [issued a public apology](#) on January 23. Assistant City Manager Bruce Mills said on behalf of city officials, "We're here today to offer our sincere apologies on behalf of the City of Austin for the past mishandling of the sexual assault cases and trauma we caused our survivors." The Travis County District Attorney's Office has also issued apologies to the survivors and created a space of remembrance for survivors of sexual assault.

Elizabeth and Jenny spent years standing and fighting with the survivors to bring change, which "created a power that was separate from the case. We were all convincing the system to change just by fighting," Elizabeth said. "And even when you lose, you can win."

[Click here](#) to learn more about the film.

Photo Credit: Julie Lunde Lillesæter/Differ Media

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