

Steering Committee Officers:
Jacqueline Kozin, *Co-Chair*
Michelle Noehren, *Co-Chair*
Christa Allard, *Outreach*
Jillian Gilchrest, *Legislative*
Kristen Pavlik, *Training/Development*



Steering Committee Members:
Sara Barczak
Michelle Dixon
Anna Doroghazi
Lauren Donais
Telisha Joyner
Shoshanna Silverberg
Nicole Terry

Jillian Gilchrest
Steering Committee Member
The Young Women's Leadership Program
A Project of the CT General Assembly's
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Before the
Public Health Committee
February 11, 2009

In support of:
H.B. 6361, AAC the Establishment of a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program

Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners are a valuable resource for victims, the medical profession, and the criminal justice system. They are capable of significantly improving evidence collection and their expertise can increase the likelihood of prosecution. Connecticut should benefit from the expertise of Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners.

A large majority of Connecticut women rank violence against women as one of their largest concerns¹. And for good reason, because according to current data, every two and a half minutes, somewhere in America, someone is sexually assaulted and overwhelmingly those victims of sexual assault are women². The Young Women's Leadership Program feels strongly that Connecticut Hospitals should provide sexual assault forensic examiner services to help prevent and protect victims of sexual assault from further abuse.

Currently, Connecticut nurses can choose to pay to be certified as a Forensic Sexual Assault Examiner because the state does not have a formalized program. According to National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) programs have the potential of improving: a victim's psychological recovery, quality of forensic evidence collection, and prosecution rates in communities they serve.³

Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS) nine sister agencies provide 24-Hour Emergency Room response to victims of sexual assault. Advocates for

¹ [Http://www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw](http://www.cga.ct.gov/pcsw)

² [Http://www.rainn.org](http://www.rainn.org)

³ National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. (2004). *The effectiveness of sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs*. Harrisburg, PA.: Rebecca Campbell.

CONNSACS receive a multidisciplinary training on sexual assault including forensic evidence collection. For certification, an advocate must know the steps of the rape kit. This is necessary for reasons including a medical professional's lack of proficiency. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, a well coordinated SAFE program greatly diminishes a need for advocates to monitor the steps of a forensic exam. They view this as a positive because advocates spend more time focusing on a victim's emotional needs and immediate concerns. Greater attention from advocates and a SAFE's more empathetic treatment can significantly impact a victim's recovery and likelihood of their cooperating with police.

Currently, the State of Connecticut reimburses hospitals for completing a sexual assault forensic exam kit. In many cases the kits are done improperly or not completed. Without accurate and well documented evidence, a victim's chance of prosecution significantly drops. The Department of Justice Office of Victims of Crime found that SAFE programs can improve evidence collection which in turn can improve the likelihood of arrest.⁴

Finally, forensic Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners are currently used throughout the country as expert witnesses. The SAFE certification and hands-on experience make a practitioner's testimony credible in court. In Wisconsin, during a 3 ½ year period, when a SAFE testified at trial, they had a 100 percent conviction rate⁵. According to a 2005 article that appeared in the Academic Journal *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, prosecution rates improved when a community had a SAFE program.⁶

The Young Women's Leadership Program believes that preventing sexual violence should be as important as promoting a victim's physical and emotional well-being. A Connecticut SAFE program is long overdue in order to protect women and men against the incredible injustices of sexual violence.

⁴ Office of Victims of Crime. (2001). *Sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs: Improving the community response to sexual assault victims*. Washington, D.C.: OVC Bulletin.

⁵ Office of Victims of Crime. (2001). *Sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs: Improving the community response to sexual assault victims*. Washington, D.C.: OVC Bulletin.

⁶ Office of Victims of Crime. (2001). *Sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs: Improving the community response to sexual assault victims*. Washington, D.C.: OVC Bulletin.