



young
women's leadership program

*empowering young women
to lead their best lives possible*

Testimony of
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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 21, 2007

RB.1013, AA Requiring Acute Care Hospitals to Make Forensic Nursing Services Available to Patients

Good Morning Senator Handley, Representative Sayers, and members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Jillian Spies and I am a member of the Young Women's Leadership Program, a project of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. I am also an intern at the Institute for Violence Prevention & Reduction and formerly a Sexual Assault Crisis Counselor.

I am here today in support of Raised Bill 1013, AA Requiring Acute Care Hospitals to Make Forensic Nursing Services Available to Patients. Forensic Nurses 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 forensic nurses, in particular, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners.

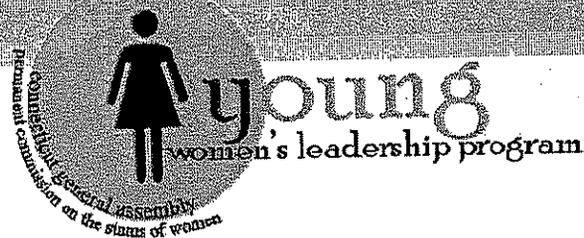
A large majority of Connecticut women rank violence against women as one of their largest concerns¹. And for good reason, because according to current data, every two and a half minutes, somewhere in American, someone is sexually assaulted and overwhelmingly those victims of sexual assault are women². The Young Women's Leadership Program feels strongly that Connecticut Hospitals should provide forensic Sexual Assault Nursing 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 Nurse Examiner because the state does not have a formalized program. According to National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women, SANE programs have the potential of

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

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

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improving: a victim's psychological recovery, quality of forensic evidence collection, and prosecution rates in communities they serve.³

Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services nine sister agencies provide 24-Hour Emergency Room response to victims of sexual assault. Advocates for 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 SANE 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 SANE'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 SANE programs can improve evidence collection which in turn can improve the likelihood of arrest.⁴

Finally, forensic Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners are currently used throughout the country as expert witnesses. The SANE certification and hands-on experience make a nurse's testimony credible in court. In Wisconsin, during a 3 ½ year period, when a SANE 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 SANE program.⁶

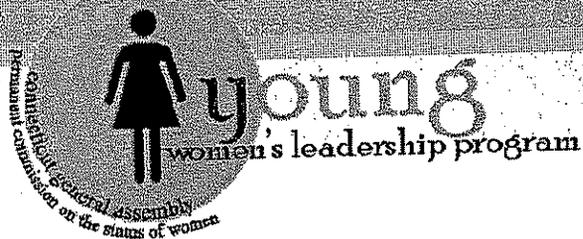
³ National Online Resource Center on Violence Against Women. (2004). The effectiveness of sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE) programs. Harrisburg, PA.: Rebecca Campbell.

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.

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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 SANE program is long overdue in order to protect women and men against the incredible injustices of sexual violence.

RB.No 6977, AAC Prevention Strategies for Diseases Caused By Human Papilloma Virus

HPV, or Human Papilloma Virus is a sexually transmitted disease that affects an overwhelming number of young people throughout the United States and in Connecticut. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 80% of women will have acquired genital HPV by age 50.⁷

HPV can infect both men and women but in women four different strands have the potential for causing cervical cancer. The Young Women's Leadership Program feels strongly that young women should be protected against HPV because of an infected woman's increased risk of developing cervical cancer.

This legislation is an important first step towards educating Connecticut's young people on Human Papilloma Virus and the importance of protecting one's body against disease. I thank you for your prompt consideration of prevention strategies against HPV, an STD that currently infects 6.2 million Americans annually.

The Young Women's Leadership Program was established in 2006 as a project of the Connecticut General Assembly's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. It is lead by a group of young women representing a wide variety of career fields and areas of expertise.

The mission of the Young Women's Leadership Program is to inspire and empower young women in high schools, vocational schools, colleges and beyond to emerge as leaders. We will provide testimony on several issues to highlight the perspectives of young women and to educate legislators about how different legislation would affect young women throughout the state.

⁷ <http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm>