CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Monday, March 3, 2008

SB 243, An Act Requiring Acute Care Hospitals To Make Forensic Nursing Services Available To Patients

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 243, An Act Requiring Acute Care Hospitals To Make Forensic Nursing Services Available To Patients.**

SB 243 would require each acute care hospital in this state to make available forensic nursing services to its patient. CHA supports the goal of increased availability and use of nurses trained in forensic science to assess and treat victims of sexual and other crimes and to collect and document evidence. This bill as written, however, fails to reflect the state's critical role and interest in forensic and prosecutorial matters and imposes an impractical burden on hospitals that could result in an inefficient allocation of scarce human resources.

Forensic nurses are specially trained to assess and treat victims of sexual and other crimes, as well as to collect and document evidence that will aid law enforcement authorities in finding and prosecuting the perpetrators of such crimes. Nurses and other emergency personnel trained in forensic science perform a critical service for the crime victims themselves, for the healthcare delivery system as a whole, which, due to shortages of nurses and other healthcare professionals, is constantly balancing the allocation of resources to provide proper assistance to persons in emergency situations, and for the state, which has a crucial interest in preserving evidence to assist in apprehending and prosecuting the perpetrators.

The goal of increasing the availability and use of forensic nurses is laudable, but SB 243 does not present a viable way to accomplish it. First, it would impose on hospitals an impractical unfunded mandate to increase the supply of trained forensic nurses. Second, the bill ignores the state's vital and necessary role in this area – the state should be funding this program to educate or train nurses or other emergency professionals in forensic science to support the victims of sexual or other crimes and the law enforcement authorities charged with apprehending and prosecuting the criminals.

For the past year, CHA has been working collaboratively with the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS) and the Connecticut College of Emergency Room Physicians (CCEP) and other organizations to increase the use and availability of forensic nurses. As a first step in that direction, CHA supports and would like to assist in the development and implementation of a regional state-funded sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE)/sexual assault forensic examiners (SAFE) program that would recruit and train SANE/SAFE personnel, and

110 Barnes Road • P.O. Box 90 • Wallingford, CT 06492-0090 • Phone: 203.265.7611 • Fax: 203.284.9318 • www.cthosp.org

establish a system for timely and efficient deployment of sexual assault forensic examiners throughout the state as they are needed. To accomplish this, CHA recommends the following attached language to establish such a SANE/SAFE program.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

Bill No. ___
LCO No. ___

General Assembly
February Session, A.D. 2008

AN ACT CONCERNING ESTABLISHMENT OF A SEXUAL ASSAULT FORENSIC EXAMINERS PROGRAM.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2008*):

(a) The state shall establish a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program that will train and maintain sexual assault forensic examiners to be made available to adolescent and adult sexual assault patients at participating acute care hospitals. Sexual assault forensic examiners shall collect evidence to be used in sexual assault investigations in accordance with the State of Connecticut Technical Guidelines for the Immediate Health Care Response to Victims of Sexual Assault.

(b) A sexual assault forensic examiner may provide immediate treatment to sexual assault patients where it is (1) acceptable pursuant to a hospital's policy and accreditation standards, and (2) approved in writing by the department of public health. Nothing in this section shall alter the scope of practice for nursing.

(c) There shall be a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program Advisory Committee consisting of representative from the CT Hospital Association, Division of Criminal Justice, the State Police, Department of Public Safety, Division of Forensic Services, Department of Public Health, Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, the Office of the State Victim Advocate, Connecticut International Association of Forensic Nurses, and the Connecticut College of Emergency Physicians. The committee shall advise the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program on the development of agreements between acute care hospitals and the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program including the scope of services offered and the inclusion of each hospital's specific standards, as well as provide guidance to the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program for case tracking and review for quality assurance and best practices for the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program, the recruitment and training of sexual assault forensic examiner nurses and physicians, the development and expansion of the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program to all Connecticut hospitals.

(d) As used in this section a "sexual assault forensic examiner" means is a registered nurse, advanced practice registered nurse or physician who provides comprehensive care, timely collection of forensic evidence and testimony in sexual assault cases and has completed a specialized training course.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Sec. 1	*Effective July 1, 2008*	New

Statement of Purpose: To establish a program to train and maintain sexual assault forensic examiners.