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**TESTIMONY RE: RAISED BILL NO. 243, AN ACT REQUIRING ACUTE  
CARE HOSPITALS TO MAKE FORENSIC NURSING SERVICES AVAILABLE  
TO PATIENTS**

**Public Health Committee Hearing**  
March 3, 2008

Good morning Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee.

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA), the professional organization for registered nurses in Connecticut. I am Dr. Mary Jane Williams, past-president of the Connecticut Nurses' Association, current chairperson of its Government Relations Committee and professor and chair of nursing at the University of Hartford. I have practiced nursing for over 40 years and have been educating nurses in Connecticut in both the public and private sector for over 35 years. I speak in support of Raised Bill 243, AA Requiring Acute Care Hospitals to Make Forensic Nursing Services Available to Patients.

When a victim of trauma arrives at a hospital it becomes imperative that the retrieving and handling of evidence is meticulous in order to help make the best possible case. Nurses who have received special training are able to provide the necessary care and also lay the necessary groundwork for prosecution of the perpetrator.

Sexual assault is a violent act perpetrated on individuals who, as a result, are physically and emotionally traumatized. The examination not only involves a physical examination but excellent skills related to counseling. If an individual does not possess these skills they can re-victimize the survivor. Evidence collection in sexual assault cases can be

further traumatizing if the collector of evidence is unprepared and unaware of the pain it inflicts during the sampling.

With the use of skilled and properly educated nurses the survivors will be assured a professional and less traumatizing experience, as well as the guarantee that the proper evidence will be collected uniformly in all sexual assault cases to enable prosecution and remove the perpetrator from the community. Persons with these skills are known as Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANES) or Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFES).

Our association agrees with our colleagues from the Connecticut Chapter, International Association of Forensic Nurses which has worked with a coalition to design an implementation plan for a rapid response SANE/SAFE program for the victims of sexual assault. This program would be an important step in strengthening forensic nursing services available to patients in Connecticut.

Sexual assault cases are labor intensive. This can be a tremendous burden on all emergency room staff as they try to respond to the pressing needs of others. In order to better respond to the sexual assault victim, the coalition reached consensus that a state-funded rapid response SANE/SAFE approach would not only improve the care of victims but also other patients, staffing of ERs, improved evidence collection and expert testimony of SANE/SAFE available during the prosecution of the perpetrator.

We respectfully request that the committee consider the recommendations of the coalition and work in an incremental approach that will be more acceptable to their partners in hospital management. In order to accomplish this program we would recommend that the language of this bill be more reflective of a state-funded, state-housed rapid response SANE/SAFE program and that implementation of the program be placed into an existing state entity, such as the Office of Victim Services.

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations for these important first steps.