

**Testimony in Support of raised bill  
SB243 An Act Requiring Acute Care Hospitals to Make Forensic Nursing Services Available to  
Patients.**

Good morning. My name is Elaine Pagliaro. I recently retired from the position of Assistant Director at the Department of Public Safety Forensic Science Laboratory. I currently am an adjunct professor at Quinnipiac University, where one of my appointments is in the Forensic Nursing clinical specialty. I have served for many years on the CT Commission for the Standardization of the Collection of Sexual Assault Evidence, am a member of the Technical Working Group on DNA Evidence for the National Institute of Justice, and have collaborated with many groups in Connecticut and in other states in training attorneys, law enforcement, medical personnel and others in the collection and preservation of physical evidence and its use in criminal and civil cases.

I am here today to speak in support of proposed bill 243, an act requiring acute care hospitals to make forensic nursing services available to patients. This bill would create a program that would make a forensic nurse available to all victims of sexual assault and other violent crimes. The importance of physical evidence in the analysis of criminal cases is well known. A trained forensic nurse possesses the knowledge of evidence and its implications. Materials may remain uncollected or items handled so that evidence may be lost or contaminated without forensic training that makes proper evidence handling second nature during patient care.

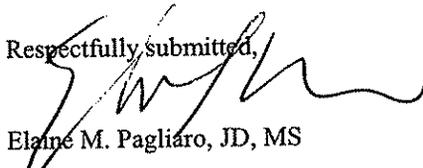
Quality evidence especially key in sexual assault investigations. Since the development of forensic DNA analysis methods and the creation of the state and national DNA databases, it is more important than ever for evidence of consistently high quality to be collected from victims. Such quality evidence allows for the identification of possible suspects when there is no known perpetrator, linking known suspects with a criminal act, and, of equal importance, the exclusion of those falsely suspected of committing a crime.

Placing a forensic nurse or sexual assault nurse examiner in the hospitals will provide access to individuals who are specifically trained to recognize physical evidence and to collect it properly so the integrity of that evidence is maintained. Studies have shown that when trained SANE programs are instituted, quality evidence complying with established guidelines is more consistently collected. Such medical personnel are familiar with the sexual assault evidence collection and patient treatment guidelines and can spend more time focused on the patient victim rather than trying to read instructions to figure out the next step in the process and to handle evidentiary materials appropriately. With forensic nurses victims receive more consistent care. Prosecutors deal with better-prepared medical witnesses whose primary focus is the holistic caring for victims of violence.

For some time, representatives from several different groups, including hospitals, counselors, educators, and forensic practitioners, have collaborated to outline a proposal to train and maintain a SANE/SAFE program for Connecticut. These forensic examiners would be available to partnering hospitals to assist adolescent and adult sexual assault patients on a 24 hour a day, on-call basis. This coalition was formed because all of us understand the value and importance of the availability of a forensic nurse / SAFE. The multi-disciplinary coalition represents the broad base of support within this state for access to a SANE/SAFE or forensic nurse by the victims of sexual assault and other violent crime.

I respectfully request that the Committee on Public Health consider raised bill 243 positively or, in the alternative, a revision of the bill's language that would create a rapid response SANE/SAFE program, and vote this bill out of committee for consideration by the entire legislature.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Elaine M. Pagliaro, JD, MS

On this the third day of March, 2008.