



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCATE  
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**Testimony of Michelle Cruz, State Victim Advocate  
Submitted to the Public Health Committee  
Wednesday, February 11, 2009**

Good morning Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding:

***Raised House Bill No. 6361, An Act Concerning the Establishment of a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners Program (Proposed Amendment)***

Sections 1, 2 and 3 of the proposal establish the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Program. Victims of sexual assault require specialized treatment and services when entering a hospital facility after suffering the devastating trauma of being sexually assaulted. We have made significant progress to address the unique needs of sexual assault victims; however, this bill addresses the immediate needs of the victim during the most crucial time- the time of reporting the sexual assault.

The registered nurses and physicians participating in this program will have specialized training to be able to respond appropriately to victims of sexual assault and to provide victims with the necessary information regarding personal options and services that are available. Too often, victims of sexual assault are enduring long and painful hours at the emergency room, traumatized and violated. The forensic exam experience without the advantage of a SANE Nurse can have irreparable harm to a victim and compound the injuries associated with the sexual assault.

Section 4 of the bill transfers the responsibility of payment for sexual assault forensic exams from the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) to the Office of Victim Services, Judicial Branch, (OVS). OVS is the state's lead agency for providing direct services to crime victims; therefore, it is logical that OVS provide this service to victims of sexual assault. Currently, OVS administers a compensation program that is available to eligible crime victims of physical injury or family members of homicide victims. Payments are directed from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund (CICF) and are limited to medical and dental expenses relating to the crime, funeral expenses, lost wages in certain cases and loss of support. Not only is the application process for compensation lengthy (typically notice of an award or denial takes four to six months), but the CICF is already severely underfunded.

The DCJ was allocated more than one million dollars for the payment of sexual assault forensic exams for the fiscal years 2008 and 2009. Raised House Bill No. 6361

**does not** provide for the transfer of the funds from the DCJ to the OVS to pay for the forensic sexual assault exams. Each forensic exam costs approximately \$900. The transfer of funds is a necessity for the OVS to accept this responsibility.

Finally, it would be essential for the OVS to adopt a separate process for the payment of sexual assault forensic exams. The current application process for the CICF would be detrimental to the well being of victims of sexual assault.

During this difficult fiscal climate, it is challenging for you to support a program that has a cost associated with its establishment. The benefits achieved through the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Program not only directly touch the lives of sexual assault victims but additionally enhance law enforcement investigations and sexual assault prosecutions. I strongly urge the committee to consider the valuable benefits over the minimal cost and support Raised House Bill No. 6361 with the slight changes I discussed.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

  
Michelle Cruz, Esq.  
State Victim Advocate