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**Testimony of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services  
Laura Cordes, Executive Director  
In support of SB 966: An Act Concerning Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners at Institutions  
of Higher Education  
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
Public Hearing March 12, 2015**

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. CONNSACS is the statewide coalition of nine community-based sexual assault crisis services programs. On behalf of our programs, staff and thousands of adult, adolescent and child survivors of sexual violence that we serve each year in our state, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on SB 966: *An Act Concerning Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners at Institutions of Higher Education*.

CONNSACS supports this bill which would allow for the expansion of the State of Connecticut's Gail Burns-Smith Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) program to serve adult and adolescent sexual assault victims at accredited university health care facilities.

Nearly a decade ago a coalition of healthcare providers and victim advocates began working together to identify the most cost-efficient, effective, and timely way to provide compassionate treatment to rape victims, collect the evidence needed to support the prosecution of sex offenders, and ensure a judicious use of scarce health care and hospital resources. Out of our efforts and with the unanimous support of lawmakers through PA 09-03 the, Gail Burns-Smith Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner ( GBS SAFE) Program was established in the Office of Victim Services (OVS) and today responds to sexual assault victims at six acute care hospitals.

The program is effective. Findings from surveys collected from survivors who have been treated by a GBS SAFE Program examiner, found that over 92% of the respondents strongly agreed with the following statement: *"I felt supported (my privacy and wishes were respected) and I received the information I needed from the SAFE during the exam."*

SAFEs are specifically trained to care for the immediate health care needs of victims of sexual violence and to collect valuable forensic evidence up to 120 hours after an assault through the CT 100 evidence collection kit. The exam is invasive and can take several hours.

In the aftermath of a sexual assault, victims deserve to have this evidence collected properly and to have the coordinated and sensitive response of both a SAFE and a sexual assault victim advocate in the environment and community most comfortable and familiar to them.

Allowing for the GBS SAFE Program to serve survivors at accredited university health care facilities will not only benefit countless student victims of sexual assault who might otherwise decline seeking a sexual assault forensic exam when the only option is an off campus hospital, but will move Connecticut one step closer to having a SAFE program that can respond to sexual assault victims at all acute care and accredited health care facilities.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me with any questions you may have.