



Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

March 12, 2015

Testimony

By

Eleanor JB Daugherty, EdD

Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students

University of Connecticut

Good afternoon. My name is Eleanor Daugherty and I am the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs and Dean of Students at the University of Connecticut. Thank you for allowing me to testify today concerning Senate Bill 966, *An Act Concerning Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners at Institutions of Higher Education*.

UConn shares a deep commitment with the state of Connecticut in ensuring that all measures are being taken to abate sexual violence through the development of bystander intervention programs and improved reporting mechanisms while also providing essential counseling and support for victims of sexual violence. I am pleased to be here in support of this legislation both on my own behalf and on the behalf of UConn students who have asked for access to SAFE exams on their campus.

September Special Session PA 09-03 provided the Judicial Branch, Office of Victim Services with the authority to train registered nurses, advanced practice registered nurses, and physicians to serve as Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE's). The training consists of 40 hours of classroom training, and 15 pelvic exams to insure that each SAFE has achieved a level of competency in the collection of forensic evidence.

SAFE's have specialized knowledge of legal issues such as chain of custody and courtroom testimony and are trained in sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and medications. These exams are critical opportunities for evidence collection following a sexual assault that can greatly assist prosecution of criminal cases. Trained SAFE's are capable of administering an exam that lasts

nearly four hours in a manner that is sensitive to the victim and allows for critical forensic evidence to be collected.

The SAFE program administered by OVS has established a standard of care that is victim centered and knowledgeable of relevant protocols surrounding evidence collection. Since the program launched in December 2012, SAFE's have responded to victims of sexual assault at 6 acute care facilities within Connecticut (Middlesex Hospital, Hartford Hospital, St. Francis Hospital, The Hospital of Central CT, New Britain, Manchester Hospital, and Windham Hospital).

For a victim on a rural university campus such as UConn's main campus in Storrs, the journey to the appropriate acute care facility can be long and frightening. Students who wish to have a forensic exam following an assault must travel to an unfamiliar hospital and wait for the arrival of a SAFE. This journey, followed by waiting in an environment that is foreign to our victim, and the length and necessarily intrusive nature of the examination itself, discourages students from agreeing to the forensic exam. Our students on our main campus have told us that this journey and unfamiliar hospital environment are two of the main reasons that very few victims receive these exams.

For state fiscal year, July 2, 2013 to June 30, 2014, the SAFE program responded to 173 sexual assault cases seen in the 6 acute care hospitals. The standard of care provided by OVS through the SAFE program is the appropriate standard to follow. SAFE trained individuals have the experience to conduct these exams sensitively and correctly. The SAFE standard of care exceeds what a university clinic can provide to victims of sexual assault. What is needed is a change in the legislation that initially authorized the SAFE program within OVS to allow SAFE practitioners to be paged to appropriately accredited university health facilities –not just acute care facilities.

It is my hope that through a change in the legislation, increased access to SAFE's will allow CT colleges and universities to improve and enhance our ability to support and counsel victims, and to make available to them resources that aid in criminal prosecution of offenders.