



st. Joseph healthcare

St. Joseph Hospital

A Member of Covenant Health

January 23, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Keri Kapaldo, I'm a registered nurse and forensic nurse with over 10 years of experience, and I am here today in support of **LD 2084, An Act to Provide Funding for Essential Services for Victims of Crimes.**

I am giving testimony today on behalf of the St. Joseph Hospital Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (St. Joe's SAFE) Program. The St. Joe's SAFE Program provides trauma-informed medical-forensic care for all victims of violence such as sexual assault and domestic violence. This bill is of particular importance to the St. Joe's SAFE Program because the victim services provided by this funding are vital to the public welfare and health of our State, community, and each other. To put it plainly, victim services save lives.

In 2023, the St. Joe's SAFE Program cared for 154 patients who were emergent victims of a violent crime. That's 154 people who needed a sexual assault or domestic violence advocate to show up at any hour of day or night, 25 of whom were minors, another five who are dependent adults. 154 people who may have needed to navigate complex systems such as DHHS, the judicial system, or civil courts for a protection from abuse order. In each of those systems, victim services to be funded by this bill are at the forefront, such as victim witness advocates, legal advocates, DHHS-CPS liaisons, and child advocacy center forensic interviewers.

78% of patients presenting to our hospital after an assault received direct service by a sexual assault or domestic violence advocate, resulting in over 700 advocate hours spent at the bedside in our small community hospital. We also consulted with patients who disclosed acute or historical sexual or domestic violence, resulting in over 350 referrals to advocacy agencies, a 218% increase from 2022. Best practice outcomes for our patients heavily rely on the presence of an advocate for support while a survivor navigates their healing holistically.

When I think about the impact an advocate has had I think of the tiny, seemingly insignificant acts that add up to big hugs, smiles, and a glimmer of hope in the survivor. I always tell my patients: "I can do a lot for you in these four walls, but once you're discharged, I'm limited. Advocacy, that's for life. They're there at 3am when you can't sleep, for a cup of coffee and a chat, or a familiar face during a stressful time." A decrease in funding would prevent access to crucial advocacy services and in turn, derail prevention efforts.

The victim services at risk without funding from this bill are essential. They prevent PTSD, child abuse and endangerment, serial battering, and ongoing victimization. These services break generational trauma and reduce death. They create resiliency and safety; they promote healing and justice. Victim services save lives.

I appreciate your time and consideration on this crucial bill. We hope you will support LD 2084 and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

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