



st. joseph healthcare

St. Joseph Hospital

A Member of Covenant Health

February 26, 2025

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

My name is Keri Kapaldo, and I am here today in support of **LD 412: An Act to Prohibit the Sale or Provision of Self-administered Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Collection Kits**.

I am submitting testimony today as a Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner, or SAFE nurse, from the St. Joseph Hospital SAFE Program. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today about the critical importance of hospital-based forensic exams and the necessity of ensuring survivors have access to these services without financial burden.

Sexual assault forensic exams are a vital part of a survivor's medical care and the justice process. Conducted by trained medical professionals, these exams allow for the identification and treatment of injuries, the prevention of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy, and the collection of forensic evidence that can be used in legal proceedings. Unlike self-administered forensic kits, sexual assault exams with specimen collection performed in a hospital setting ensure a proper chain of custody for evidence, increasing its admissibility in court and supporting the prosecution of offenders.

Beyond evidence collection, these exams provide an opportunity for comprehensive medical care. Survivors of sexual violence may suffer injuries they may not immediately recognize, such as internal trauma or strangulation-related complications. As SAFE nurses, we are trained to assess and document these injuries, provide appropriate treatment, and connect survivors with advocacy and mental health resources to support their healing.

Importantly, in cases where evidence is collected in a hospital setting, the cost of the forensic exam is covered by Victims' Compensation funds. This ensures that survivors are not deterred from seeking necessary medical and forensic care due to financial concerns. Without this guarantee, many survivors may opt out of seeking an exam, resulting in lost opportunities for medical intervention, forensic evidence collection, and legal recourse.

The proliferation of self-administered forensic evidence collection kits poses a significant risk to survivors. These kits lack the safeguards of a hospital-based forensic exam, including adherence to best practices in evidence collection, proper storage, and the presence of trained medical professionals. Survivors who rely on self-administered kits may later find that their evidence is inadmissible in court, denying them the justice they seek. Additionally, these kits do not provide critical medical care or access to advocacy services, leaving survivors without essential support.

For these reasons, I urge you to support legislation that protects survivors by ensuring they have access to professional, hospital-based forensic exams. We must reaffirm our commitment to providing trauma-informed medical care and ensuring that survivors receive the resources they need to heal and pursue justice.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Keri Kapaldo, BSN, RN, SANE-A, ME-SAFE-A, ME-SAFE-P  
St. Joseph Hospital SAFE Program Coordinator