



State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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CONTACT: Lawrence B. Cook, 860-240-8609
Emily Boushee, 860-240-8742

SEN. FLEXER, REP. HADDAD SECURE BIPARTISAN, UNANIMOUS SUPPORT FOR COLLEGE SEX ASSAULT EXAM BILL

State Senator Mae Flexer (D-Killingly) and state Representative Gregory Haddad (D-Mansfield) today joined with their Republican and Democratic colleagues on the Higher Education Committee to unanimously support a bill that would extend a successful sexual assault forensic examination program from six acute care hospitals in the state to the University of Connecticut infirmary – thereby providing the victims of a campus sexual assault with quicker, more compassionate care.

The committee gave its unanimous and bipartisan support today to Raised Bill 966, “An Act Concerning Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners at Institutions of Higher Education.”

The bill would extend the state’s six-year old Gail Burns-Smith Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) Program run by the state Office of Victim Services from its present location in six acute care hospitals across Connecticut (Middlesex Hospital, Hartford Hospital, St. Francis Hospital, The Hospital of Central CT, New Britain, Manchester Hospital and Windham Hospital) to UConn’s Hilda May Williams Student Health Services Medical Center on the Storrs campus.

The move would allow trained, sexual assault forensic examiner nurses to provide more immediate care and treatment to a victim of a college sexual assault, thereby negating the need for a student sexual assault victim to travel some distance to a potentially unfamiliar health care facility to undergo an invasive examination after a sexual assault.

“Once again Connecticut is taking a more comprehensive and compassionate approach to campus sexual assaults,” said **Sen. Flexer**, whose Senate district includes UConn. “And we are leading because UConn students came forward and fought to bring these services to their campus. Representative Haddad and I heard from dozens of students that victims were not moving forward with these exams because the lengthy travel caused additional stress and trauma. By making it easier for sex assault victims to get the help they need in a more timely and familiar fashion, we can more quickly begin the personal healing process and the criminal investigation process.”

“It is critically important that after trauma, students should feel supported and cared for at their own university. Not ensuring this will only contribute to the shocking and unfortunate number of rapes that go unreported,” said **Rep. Haddad**, whose House district includes UConn. “We need to start tearing down whatever roadblocks lay in the way of victims reporting a sexual assault and receiving medical treatment. Many college students are away from home for the very first time and are adjusting to an entirely new support network. Asking victims to leave this new support network to receive medical care is the wrong approach to keeping our students as safe, healthy and emotionally supported as possible.”

SAFE nurses (Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners) receive 40 hours of classroom training and conduct 15 pelvic exams to insure that they have achieved a level of competency in the collection of forensic evidence (the exams can last up to four hours.) SAFE nurses also 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

Last year (July 2013 to July 2014), SAFE nurses responded to 173 sexual assault cases in the six acute care hospitals

College students, university officials and women’s health advocates all testified in support of RB 966 when it received its public hearing on March 12, noting that over 92% of students who received SAFE services strongly agreed that their privacy and wishes were respected and that they received valuable information.

If passed by members of the House and Senate and signed into law by Governor Malloy, the new law would take effect July 1.

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