



**STATE OF CONNECTICUT
JUDICIAL BRANCH**

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PRESS ADVISORY:

Judicial Branch Announces Program for Sexual Assault Victims

An around-the-clock program designed to make it easier for sexual assault victims who go the hospital for collection of evidence is now available at six hospitals in central and eastern Connecticut, Chief Court Administrator Barbara M. Quinn announced today.

The Gail Burns-Smith Sexual Assault Forensic Examiners (SAFE) program is named after Ms. Gail Burns-Smith, a longtime advocate for sexual assault victims and former executive director of Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services Inc. The program provides to participating hospitals nurses and doctors who have been specially trained in the collection of evidence from sexual assault victims.

The General Assembly authorized the Judicial Branch to implement the program through legislation it enacted in 2009.

“We know that a negative experience at the hospital can greatly increase the trauma a sexual assault victim has already experienced,” Judge Quinn said. “We are confident that this program will go a long way toward better assisting a sexual assault victim during a very difficult time.”

The Judicial Branch’s Office of Victim Services administers the program, and an advisory board has overseen its implementation. Information regarding the board is available through the Judicial Branch website, at <http://www.jud.ct.gov/Committees/safe/default.htm>

“The OVS is proud to play such an integral part in implementing this program,” OVS Director

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2-2-2-2 SAFE

Linda J. Cimino said. “However, the real key to its success are the medical professionals who have volunteered to be part of the SAFE program.”

Before the SAFE program was implemented, according to Ms. Cimino, sexual assault victims who went to the hospital often had to wait hours to be seen and have evidence collected. And if the doctor or nurse was not trained in evidence collection, then the wait could be longer, she explained.

When sexual assault victims go to a hospital participating in the SAFE program, the on-duty nurse calls the SAFE phone number. In turn, the nurse or doctor on call will gather information about the case and go to the hospital. Response time to the hospital is about an hour, and between their training and experience with collecting such evidence, medical responders greatly reduce the amount of time that a sexual assault victim must spend at the hospital, Ms. Cimino said.

Details of the program include:

- A total of 30 sexual assault victims have been assisted since the program began in December 2010.
- Seventeen nurses have already been trained through two sessions; a third, with 10 nurses enrolled, will conclude in early May. Once certified as a sexual assault forensic examiner, they are contractors of the Judicial Branch.
- Six hospitals are currently participating: Hartford Hospital, The Hospital of Central Connecticut, Manchester Memorial Hospital, Middlesex Hospital, St. Francis Hospital and Medical Center, and Windham Hospital.
- The program was previously offered 96 hours per week. Effective April 7, it became available 24 hours per day, seven days a week.
- The program is funded through a federal Justice Assistance grant totaling \$719,713, and also through \$346,666 in Violence Against Women funding (\$51,165 in state funds is provided by the state Office of Policy and Management).

For further information, please contact the External Affairs Division at 860-757-2270.

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