



PENNSYLVANIA CHAPTER

March 5, 2022

Dear Members of the Senate Appropriations Committee and Honorable Members of the Senate,

The Pennsylvania (PA) Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) would like to express our sincere thanks for your attention to issues surrounding the exploitation and maltreatment of children and ensuring that mandated reporting guidelines are consistently followed. After reviewing the proposed language in SB 970, we believe this Bill would considerably alter the scope and purpose of the Sexual Assault Testing and Evidence Collection Act (SATEC). Consequently, we are joining our colleagues at the Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape and The Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence in respectfully requesting that you oppose SB 970.

IAFN is an international membership organization comprised of over 6,500 forensic nurses and other professionals who support the healthcare response to those affected by violence. Of those members 258 are located in Pennsylvania. Forensic nurses are registered or advanced practice nurses who have received specialized education and training to provide care for patients who have experienced acute and long-term health consequences associated with victimization or violence. In addition, forensic nurses provide consultation and testimony for civil and criminal proceedings relative to nursing practice, care given, and opinions rendered regarding findings. Forensic nursing care is not separate and distinct from other forms of medical care, but rather integrated into the overall care needs of individual patients.

The General Assembly adopted SATEC in 2006 with the intent of establishing a sexual assault evidence collection and testing program to promote the health, safety and rights of victims of sexual assault and to facilitate the prosecution of persons accused of sexual assault. As a result, victims receive care and services in a trauma-informed manner by a team of medical professionals, victim advocates, and law enforcement working in concert for the benefit of the victim. The Act serves to ensure that evidence is collected, transported, stored and tested following a designated timeline while maintaining chain of custody. Additionally, victims have the right to receive information regarding protective orders, victim's compensation and restitution, and disclosure of information regarding analysis of evidence collected during the investigation.

SB 970 changes the tenor of SATEC by creating a reporting program related to minors, which includes the prosecution of persons willfully failing to report suspected child abuse. The Department of Human Services administers mandated reporting laws under 23 Pa. C.S.A. Chapter 63 which identifies individuals required to report suspected child abuse and includes measures for non-compliance. Healthcare professionals, including forensic nurses, are already mandated reporters under this law and are required to report suspected child abuse, suspected abuse of adults with disabilities and elder abuse. A comprehensive medical-forensic exam comprises such reporting to the appropriate agencies designated by the Commonwealth.



The PA Chapter believes that any concerns regarding mandated reporting of suspected child abuse should continue to be addressed by the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services rather than the Pennsylvania Department of Health as proposed in SB 970. SATEC's focus should remain on victim's rights and public safety, not diminished in favor of a child reporting and retribution system. For these reasons, **we reiterate our opposition to SB 970 and urge you to vote against it.**

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact us at piafn33@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like to discuss this further.

Respectfully,