



Working to end sexual violence in Maryland

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Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 950 with Sponsor Amendments
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The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge the Finance Committee to report favorably on Senate Bill 950 with Sponsor Amendments.

Senate Bill 950 - TeleSAFE – Expanding Access to Sexual Assault Forensic Exams

This bill will help increase access to sexual assault forensic exams ("SAFE", commonly called rape kits) by allowing peer-to-peer telehealth.

There is a crisis in access to sexual assault forensic exams in Maryland. This is a long-standing issue and has been resistant to efforts to address the problem. Structurally, the system is not as survivor-friendly as it could or should be. Survivors are required to go to specific hospitals and, if they present at the "wrong" hospital, must go elsewhere. The statewide nursing shortage exacerbates this issue and sometime survivors are sent to other hospitals even when they present at a hospital with a SAFE program because there is no forensic nurse available. This is not only unacceptable, it is now creating an opportunity for exploitation by companies seeking to profit off of sexual assault survivors (see companion bill, SB949, proposing a ban on self-administered rape kits).

In 2014, legislation was introduced to require all hospitals to offer exams. This was amended to require protocols on how to respond to sexual assault survivors, and the requirement to provide actual exams was stricken. In 2017, the General Assembly created the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee to help address continuing issues. Now, in 2024 in the face of continued

challenges, SB950 is proposed by the Committee. Uncodified language will direct that telehealth options be explored.

More importantly, **the bill proposes allowing “peer to peer telehealth” for exams.** This is modeled loosely after a program in Pennsylvania and will allow a forensic nurse in one location to use telehealth to direct a qualified health care provider who is performing and exam on a patient/survivor in another location.

The International Association of Forensic Nurses and the Office for Victims of Crime both support the use of telehealth services for forensic exams is increasing across the country. This has the potential to help increase access to exams in the face of continuing challenges. It also has the potential to support more survivors as they seek to have evidence of rape collected so they have the option of pursuing justice.

Sponsor amendments clarify that “peer-to-peer” telehealth is authorized. This is necessary because current regulations require that a forensic nurse perform the exam on the patient.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges the
Finance Committee to
report favorably on Senate Bill 950 with Sponsor Amendments**