



**Tisha Scheuer- Executive Director,
Central Dakota Forensic Nurse Examiners**

**Support HB1003
North Dakota House Appropriations**

January 29, 2025

Chairman Nathe and members of the House Appropriations Committee, my name is Tisha Scheuer, I am the Executive Director for Central Dakota Forensic Nurse Examiners (CDFNE).

I am testifying today in support of HB 1003, which will maintain crucial funding needed for forensic nursing services for victims of violence across our state through the “forensic nurse examiners grants”. Today I want to highlight the work forensic nurses in our state do, the impact this funding has on these services, and highlight why continuing this funding opportunity is essential.

About CDFNE

CDFNE is a North Dakota based non-profit organization providing forensic medical services to children and adult survivors of sexual violence, domestic violence, physical abuse and neglect in western North Dakota. Our organization serves 23 counties, in western North Dakota with our headquarters in Bismarck. Our team of 23 Forensic Nurse Examiners work with a variety of partners including law enforcement, advocacy agencies, social services, children’s advocacy centers, and hospitals as part of local multidisciplinary response teams. These partnerships ensure North Dakota victims receive comprehensive, coordinated care while supporting the investigation and prosecution of crimes.

Ongoing Forensic Nurse Examiner Grant

The forensic nurses in North Dakota are trained to recognize, document, and respond to injuries caused by sexual violence, and strangulation. This includes detailed documentation, precise measurements, swabbing for DNA collection, collection of debris evidence, collection of clothing, individual photograph of injuries, and use of specialized equipment such as colposcopes and alternative light sources—elements that are crucial not only for medical care but also for providing tools for victims seeking justice through legal proceedings. These exams are intricate, sometimes lasting 6-8 hours, as we aim to provide trauma-informed care that makes victims feel safe, seen, and supported. The money that is allocated through this grant process is crucial for maintaining this service for victims. With the money we were awarded, we have been able to provide services to over 484 victims who have experienced sexual violence in the last biennium.

Breaking that number down further, in 2023, across all four locations of CDFNE we served 235 victims. In 2024, we served 249 victims. These victims are of all ages, including babies, small children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly. The primary reason we can provide these services to our patients is the funding we received through the forensic nurse examiners grants. We are deeply grateful for this support and all it has enabled us to do for individuals in communities across western North Dakota.

I would like to briefly share just one example of the 484 victims this funding helped:

Victim Aged 10- This victim presented to the community hospital with her mother who had found her after she had been lured by social media. It was confirmed she had been sexually assaulted. The forensic examination included 13 individual photos of injuries she sustained to her genitalia. This funding enabled us to provide her and her mother with forensic medical services, support, and referrals for resources at the time of her forensic examination.

Next, I'm going to discuss the **Domestic Violence Pilot Program Grant**

During the 2023 Legislative session, this body approved a pilot program to expand access to forensic medical services to include victims of domestic violence, physical abuse, and neglect.

Under that pilot program CDFNE expanded services in our Bismarck and Williston regions, which cover ten counties. (Burleigh, Morton, Kidder, Grant, Emmons, Sheridan, Sioux, Williams, McKenzie and Divide).

The work we accomplished under the program included the development of protocols and policies, coordinating with members of our multidisciplinary teams in each region and providing our nurses with additional training. The training completed was the Interpersonal Partner Violence Nurse Examiner (IPVNE) certificate program offered by the International Association of Forensic Nurses. This advanced training enhanced our ability to provide care to victims of violence and reinforced our role as essential members of multidisciplinary response teams—an evidence-based best practice in addressing violence. Research shows that forensic medical exams conducted by trained forensic nurses improve health outcomes for victims and significantly increase prosecution rates for perpetrators. After laying all the groundwork with policy, meetings and training we launched services for victims in February of 2024. The pilot program demonstrated the demand for these expanded services and the capacity of our forensic nurses to meet that need effectively. We were able to provide services to 62 victims in that 10-month period, who experienced domestic violence, child abuse and neglect in 2024.

I would like to briefly share two examples of the victims this pilot program helped:

Victim Age 78 The victim was admitted to the ICU due to severe injuries after being beaten with a club for approximately 10 minutes. The exam included 149 photos documenting physical abuse

injuries, including open wounds on her head that required 14 stitches and a hairline wrist fracture. The victim worked closely with our forensic nursing team and an advocate from the Abused Adult Resource Center (AARC). The pilot program enabled us to also provide follow-up care, including additional examinations to monitor healing and ongoing support through the advocate.

Victim Age 4 The victim presented with confirmed abuse, including kicking and hitting, which resulted in bruising across her body. Our documentation included 89 photos of physical abuse. Further examination revealed that her legs had been submerged in scalding hot water, causing burns. Bruising on her neck and ears were also consistent with strangulation.

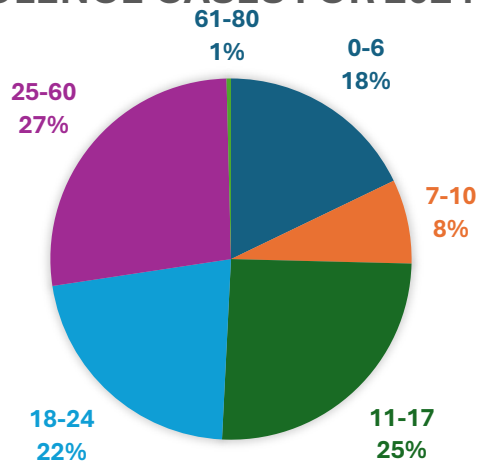
Each of these stories reinforces why it is essential to make sure victims have access to forensic medical services. Without this pilot program these individuals may not have received the compassionate care they needed, and opportunities for justice may have been lost.

On behalf of the victims and forensic nurses across the state, thank you for recognizing the importance of the work we do, and for your continued commitment to the citizens of North Dakota

Tisha Scheuer, Executive Director

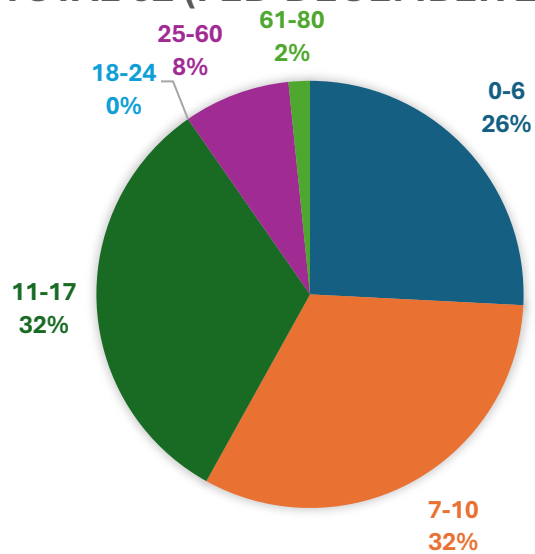
Central Dakota Forensic Nurse Examiners

**CENTRAL DAKOTA FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINERS
SEXUAL VIOLENCE CASES FOR 2024 TOTAL 252**



**BISMARCK DV/CHILD PHYSICAL ABUSE AND
NEGLECT**

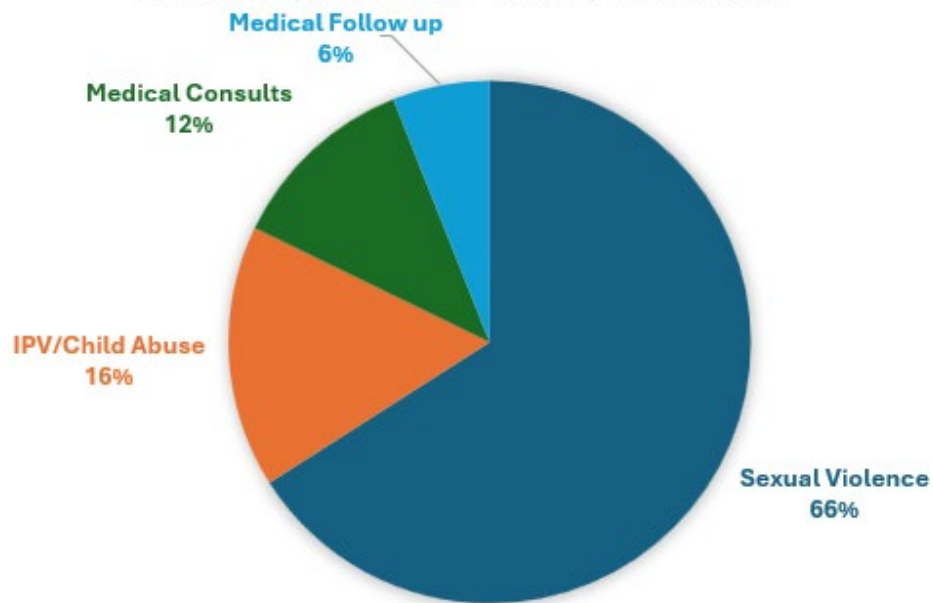
TOTAL 62 (FEB-DECEMBER 2024)



Please note:

The IPV/Child Abuse numbers are for Feb-December 2024 only

**CENTRAL DAKOTA FORENSIC NURSE EXAMINERS
MEDICAL SERVICES PROVIDED IN 2024**



Please note:

The above graph reflects medical services only and does not reflect the education/training and awareness prevention we provide for western North Dakota