

Chair Larson and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, My name is Michelle Locke, and I serve as the Coordinator for the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program at Jamestown Regional Medical Center in Jamestown, North Dakota. I am here today to express my **support for SB 2209**, which will provide critical updates to forensic medical services for victims of sexual assault, domestic violence, child abuse, and neglect throughout our state.

Our program is a hospital-based forensic nursing initiative operated by a dedicated team of 10 nurses. While we function within the framework of the hospital, we are independently managed and rely heavily on grants and external funding to sustain our services. We proudly serve Stutsman County and surrounding areas, providing vital access to care for victims of sexual and domestic violence who would otherwise face the hardship of traveling to Fargo or Bismarck for care.

Collaboration is at the heart of our work. We partner closely with the Jamestown Police Department, Central Valley Human Service Center, and the Safe Shelter in Jamestown. Together, we ensure that victims receive comprehensive, coordinated care, from medical and forensic support to social services and emotional support.

Our services encompass both in-hospital and outreach care:

- **Hospital-Based Care:** All sexual assault exams are conducted in the emergency department at JRMC, where we've recently implemented a two-nurse model. This change has significantly reduced exam times, ensuring victims spend less time in the facility while maintaining the highest standards of evidence collection and care. One nurse performs the hands-on examination while the other documents and records evidence. This approach not only improves efficiency but also enhances the integrity of the evidence chain.
- **Outreach Services:** Through collaboration with local law enforcement, we now conduct domestic violence exams at the jail. This innovation allows us to examine victims in a secure environment without the logistical challenges of transferring them out of custody. Using specially designed travel kits, two nurses—accompanied by a guard or officer—perform these exams with safety and dignity in mind. This program was made possible by the legislature's pilot program passed in 2023, demonstrating the transformative impact of the program.

Despite our progress, there are still unmet needs. For example, we currently refer approximately 15 pediatric sexual assault cases per year to Fargo or Bismarck due to a lack of local SANE-trained pediatric examiners. While I am working to have two of our nurses trained in this critical area, we lack the necessary funding for their certification. Continued funding of forensic nursing programs in our state is critical for us to continue to meet the needs of victims in our region.

The funding and resources provided by programs like the 2023 pilot project have been instrumental in enabling us to innovate and improve our services. Without this support, we would not be able to provide the level of care and expertise that our community deserves.

I urge you to give SB 2209 a "DO PASS" recommendation. This bill represents an investment in the safety, dignity, and recovery of victims across North Dakota. With your support, we can continue to provide life-changing care and ensure that no victim is left without access to the services they need.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Michelle Locke, RN
SANE Coordinator
Jamestown Regional Medical Center