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"Restoring hope. Building futures. Changing lives."

Senate Bill No. 2202
Senate Appropriations Committee
Testimony Presented by Courtney Monroe Ryckman, LBSW
Email: courtneymr@aacnd.com
February 1, 2023

Chairman Bekkedahl and members of the Committee, my name is Courtney Monroe Ryckman, Direct Services Supervisor at the Abused Adult Resource Center (AARC) in Bismarck with 20 years of experience working with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, I am here today in support of SB 2202. AARC serves a seven-county service area in south central North Dakota including the Bismarck-Mandan area and is one of 20 domestic violence and sexual assault programs in North Dakota.

Last year AARC served 889 new victims of domestic violence. At this time, it is difficult to quantify the number of those victims who might utilize this level of care from a specially trained forensic nurse because its simply not offered anywhere in the state of North Dakota. According to a similar project in another part of the country, when incorporating forensic nurses into the response for domestic violence victims, documentation and photography has let to increases in felony charges and higher rates of plea agreements. Both of these are results that can improve not only victim safety by community safety by holding violent offenders accountable.

In my experience as an advocate responding to the hospital for a domestic violence incident I have been asked by law enforcement to take pictures of female victims when there was no one else available. This is often considered a last resort for advocates and led to me having to testify in court to pictures I took six months prior, the pictures were not good, I had no training or guidance for taking these pictures for evidence collection purposes.

For the last twenty years the Bismarck-Mandan communities has offered this level of treatment and care to victims who are seeking forensic medical care following an incident of sexual assault, it is time to make the same level of care available to victims of intimate partner physical violence. Through the passage of this legislation it is my hope that we will demonstrate a consistent, caring response to domestic violence victims.

Thank you for this opportunity and if you have any questions, please let me know.

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Office: 701-222-8370 • Fax: 701-323-9399
24-Hr. Crisis: Toll Free: 1-866-341-7009
www.abusedadultresourcecenter.com

