

Chair Prozanski and members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

I am here in support of Senate Bill 795.

My name is Patricia Kenyon. I am a nurse with 40 years of experience in the emergency department. I now work in Albany as a sexual assault nurse examiner and supervisor for Sarah's Place, the state's only clinic devoted specifically to victims of sexual assault. I chair the Medical Forensic Committee of the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Task Force and currently sit on the government affairs committee for the International Association of Forensic Nurses. I always call an advocate to help me with our clients.

The advocate is a person whose role is to provide information and support to sexual assault survivors over days to weeks to months to years of recovery. They are trained to understand the victim's experience and reactions to it. They know the medical and legal steps that the victim is being offered. They also know the community support systems that are available. With this understanding and knowledge, they are in a unique position to help both the survivor and their family, to understand and articulate their point of view, to guide and support them as they go from crisis victim to healthy survivor.

In my facility, an advocate is always called to respond for the survivor from the get go. Once the survivor has met with an advocate, they rarely decline their services. When an advocate is present, I am able to focus on the survivor's medical and forensic needs. It is very reassuring to have someone in the room who is concentrating on the survivor's emotional needs. I have seen the impact that an advocate has on a survivor, both short and long term. They help them navigate the confusing medical and legal worlds and are a second pair of ears that can help document what is being told the survivor. Medical follow up improves when the survivor knows when the appointments are.

Without an advocate, the survivor is apt to receive incomplete information, pressure tactics, additional emotional stress and/or misdirection. The path to recovery becomes arduous as survivors of sexual assault experience among the highest rates of PTSD. Advocates can help mitigate and alleviate the long-term impact of trauma, providing immediate crisis intervention and connection to long-term resources, such as: the Address Confidentiality Program, counseling resources, safety planning, protective and restraining orders, and Crime Victims' Compensation.

I support SB 795 because it is consistent with national best practice, outlined by the International Association of Forensic Nurses. It ensures that all survivors receive the same level of care no matter where they reside or seek care. For these reasons, I urge you to support this bill.