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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing you to state my support of Senate Bill 795 which would require that a Victim Advocate be contacted during every Sexual Assault Nurse Exam (SANE) to offer information and supportive services to the survivor. Deschutes County Victims Assistance implemented an on call program starting late in 2015 that ensures a District Attorney based Victim Advocate is available for any SANE exam or after-hour law enforcement need. The development of this program started as a result from a discussion at our local SART (Sexual Assault Response Team). The summary of the discussion was that our county believes that survivors have a right to be supported and informed during this process and not every survivor was being offered support. Our local Sexual Assault Domestic Violence non-profit was providing a confidential advocate to survivors 15 years old or older and no advocate support was being offered to survivors under the age of 15 and their families. We filled that gap.

Since the implementation of our on call program, DA based advocates have responded to 32 requests for an advocate to provide supportive services to a survivor and their family while at the hospital. SANE nurses describe our support as invaluable to survivors who are experiencing the ripple effects of an extremely traumatic event. When a survivor experiences sexual assault, someone needs to be present and provide information to the survivor who only has the survivor's interest in mind. Law enforcement is an excellent resource, but their goal is to arrest a perpetrator. SANE nurses are great, but they are focused on the SANE kit collection. An advocate's entire focus is the survivor and providing them information to make an educated decision moving forward.

I am also hoping that SB 795 will address one of the service gaps that we experience as DA Victim Advocates. We receive calls from survivors who at the time of their sexual assault were never provided information that allowed them to make an educated decision about reporting or not reporting their sexual assault. Some survivors contact DA Victims Assistance Programs several years after the sexual assault wanting to pursue criminal charges. Unfortunately, unless SANE kits are collected during the initial investigation and marked as non-reporting kits, many Deputy District Attorneys are faced with a case they can't prove, so victims do not receive justice. Mandated contact with a victim advocate up-front would provide this information at the critical time that survivors need to make an educated decision for their health and well-being.

Based on our experiences in Deschutes County, I am in full support of SB 795 and the provision of a victim advocate during SANE exams. I am available to provide any additional information you need about either the successes and challenges with establishing 24/7 advocate availability or establishing a supportive service response of advocates during SANE exams.

Sincerely,

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