

As an advocate in Douglas County, I believe the changes that could be created by the passing of SB 795 would increase our capacity to offer support, resources and services to our county's sexual assault survivors. There is just one medical facility that conducts forensic examinations for the victims of sexual assault within Douglas County. Far too frequently, survivors arrive at the hospital alone, confused and without adequate support. Upon arriving at the hospital, survivors often face long waits both in the Emergency Room waiting area and again upon being admitted for examination. Sexual assault exams in Douglas County are infrequent, averaging fewer than 30 each year, which means that many ER nurses are unfamiliar with the role, purpose and importance of having a victim advocate available to support the survivor. Nurses typically ask survivors during the triage process, "Do you want me to call an advocate?" often without explaining to the survivor the role an advocate would play. Survivors have reported this practice leads to a lack of understanding regarding what an advocate does and therein an overall lack of support, information and assistance navigating through a confusing judicial process.

Information and education has been provided to the hospital and local Law Enforcement including best practice guidelines that highlight the important role an advocate plays in supporting survivors of sexual violence and ensuring continued survivor involvement in the judicial process. Additional information was also shared regarding best practice recommendations of notifying an advocate as soon as a sexual assault presents, however these recommendations have yet to be used. Implementation of SB 795 would allow us to shift from a casually asked "Do you want us to call an advocate" to a victim-centered approach of automatically having an advocate on site, who can then explain the role of advocacy during a sexual assault response. I wholeheartedly believe in the importance of this Bill in increasing advocates access to survivors, which may therein keep survivors engaged in the long-term judicial process, leading to more perpetrators being held accountable for their crimes.

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