

Roberta DiMezza

From: Jennifer Rourke <jennifer@norashavenri.com>
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Hello members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Jennifer Rourke and I am the director of Nora's Haven, a non-profit organization that provides comprehensive culturally sensitive support, housing, and education for victims of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and human trafficking. I am also a survivor of domestic abuse and rape.

I am here today to testify in opposition to House Bill 7449, specifically the portion that would require a medical forensic exam in order to qualify for funds under the State Crime Victim Compensation Program for victims of sexual abuse or rape. While we feel that the requirement of a police report is also problematic, we feel that this new requirement of a medical forensic exam would also put additional unneeded stress on victims, and might miss abuse that does not have any physical symptoms.

We feel that it would be difficult for victims to locate a qualified doctor to perform the exam, as it's difficult to even locate who in the state can perform these exams, how many of them exist and what the backlog would be to get an appointment, especially given a limited 15 days to receive the exam as documented in the bill. One of our staff did a search and determined that there was a backlog of 8 weeks to get a medical forensic exam. What would happen until then?

There are additional concerns around how much it would cost and whether insurance would pay for the exam. We are concerned about the abuser finding out about the search for a doctor, or other information that might be mailed to the house (such as insurance forms) that could lead to further abuse.

There is also concern about how Black and Brown individuals are treated by doctors as well as economic class factoring in. Also, it is concerning whether or not it would violate HIPAA rules and/or patient privacy by having a victim forced to share the results of a private medical exam to the state Treasurer's office.

To have victims jump through additional hoops that are extremely invasive as well as difficult to obtain would only make victims give up on seeking this help, or could potentially make a bad abusive situation worse if the abuser were to find out.

We hope that you will consider not implementing this new requirement which only addresses victims of sexual abuse or rape, and removing the police report as a requirement for victims to receive assistance. Thank you.

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