



Maryland
Hospital Association

House Bill 675- Public Safety - Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund - Alterations

Position: *Support*

February 11, 2025

House Judiciary Committee

MHA Position

On behalf of the Maryland Hospital Association’s (MHA) member hospitals and health systems, we appreciate the opportunity to comment in support of House Bill 675.

Hospital-based sexual assault forensic exam ([SAFE](#)) programs employ forensic nurse examiners (FNEs)—registered nurses who receive special training in evidence collection—to care for survivors of various types of violence, abuse, and neglect. FNEs are experts in delivering trauma-informed care. State law ensures survivors of sexual assault have access to emergency medical treatment for their injuries with no out-of-pocket expense.

Many SAFE programs rely on grant funding to support their staffing and infrastructure costs. As a result, programs can face staffing challenges where they are unable to provide 24/7/365 coverage, especially in rural or less populated areas of the state. As required by state law, (Health General 19-310.2), all hospitals have a protocol in place to ensure survivors of sexual assault have timely access to an exam. However, this can result in survivors being transferred to another hospital to receive a SAFE.

In 2024, SB 950 was signed into law to study and make recommendations on the feasibility of a telehealth program including a TeleSAFE Pilot Program to expand access to sexual assault forensic services. The law also created a definition of peer-to-peer telehealth, which includes “the performance of a forensic examination, the use of interactive audio, video, or other telecommunications or electronic technology by a forensic nurse examiner to assist in the performance of a forensic examination when the forensic nurse examiner is in one location and the patient is with a qualified health care provider in another location.”

HB 675 expands the eligible uses of the Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund to include support for peer-to-peer telehealth. Allowing hospitals to tap into this fund for workforce and infrastructure needs to support the establishment of peer-to-peer telehealth services, can help support the existing forensic nursing workforce. TeleSAFE services can be helpful during case consultations, in-exam support, as well as assisting in training and simulation exercises for new to practice FNEs. TeleSAFE could also be valuable for helping answer patient queries, offering more information regarding the exam process and other resources, and helping newly trained or inexperienced FNEs feel more competent performing SAFEs.

Many Maryland hospitals rely on federal funding to support their workforce and infrastructure needs. In a time when access to future federal funding is uncertain, HB 675 offers an important expansion of the eligibility criteria that allows hospitals to tap into these funds. Supporting hospital SAFE programs and the FNE workforce is critical to ensure access to care for survivors of sexual assault and other forms of violence, abuse, and neglect across the state.

For these reasons, we request a favorable report on HB 675.

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