



My name is Mary Faulkner, and I am the Criminal Justice Services Coordinator at PAVSA (Program for Aid to Victims of Sexual Assault). Located in Duluth, PAVSA's mission is the elimination of sexual violence in Southern Saint Louis County through supporting victims, educating the community, and advocating for change. I supervise PAVSA's community-based Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Program, and our specially-trained nurses respond to four local hospitals when patients disclose sexual assault.

In this capacity, I assist victims when they are billed in error after sexual assault exams. I write to ask you to support House File 1279 and require the state to pay medical examination costs for criminal sexual conduct victims. Victims should never be billed for sexual assault forensic exams.

In the past six months, six victims have reached out PAVSA because they were billed for their sexual assault exams. Typically, these bills have arrived four to six weeks after the exam, and they are an intrusion upon the victim's life and healing process. Recently, a victim apologized to me for calling us to help with their bill. They told me that they were hesitant to call and did not know what to do. I worry that there are many more victims who are billed that we never hear from. These bills range from \$300 - \$1000. Many victims live paycheck to paycheck, and an unexpected bill of any amount causes distress and anxiety. It could also have serious financial consequences.

At PAVSA, we have options to assist victims who have been billed, but this assistance does not undo the harm caused from receiving the bill. I've learned that under the current county-payor system, hospitals bill victims when they do not know where to send the bill – for example, if the location of the incident is not documented or disclosed by the patient. House File 1279 would provide clarity to hospitals by creating a single statewide payment system. Increasing clarity for the hospitals would reduce the number of victims billed in error.

Worrying about the possibility of being billed under the current payment system has a chilling effect on victims' decision to seek care. Minnesotans deserve high quality, trauma-informed care in the aftermath of a sexual assault, and they should have confidence that they can seek a forensic medical exam without fear of the financial impact. Respectfully, I ask you to support House File 1279. Thank you for your time.