



Virginia Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Coordination Program

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During the 2020 Regular Session of the Virginia General Assembly, policymakers created *Code of Virginia § 9.1-191* establishing the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Coordination Program at the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), effective July 1, 2020.¹ The goals of the program include the development and enhancement of sexual assault forensic examiner programs across Virginia, establishing a partnership group to plan forensic nurse training, assisting with developing protocols and guidelines for the treatment of victims of sexual assault, and collecting and maintaining information on all available sexual assault forensic services in Virginia.

DCJS has hired the Sexual Assault Forensic Services Coordinator (coordinator) to lead this program. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the specialized nature of the position, the agency was unable to fill the position until June 25, 2021.

The coordinator has ten responsibilities outlined in *Code of Virginia § 9.1-191*. Current activities related to each responsibility are described below.

1. *Create and coordinate an annual statewide sexual assault forensic nurse examiner training program in partnership with the Attorney General, the Department of Health, the Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association, the Victim Compensation Fund, the International Association of Forensic Nurses, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services.*

The coordinator has met individually with representatives from each listed agency and is preparing for the first joint meeting of the partnership group to introduce the program mandates outlined in § 9.1-191.

2. *Coordinate the development and enhancement of sexual assault forensic examiner programs across the Commonwealth that include prevention of secondary trauma to survivors and culturally sensitive training for health professionals.*

The coordinator has met individually with representatives from Forensic Nurse Examiner (FNE) programs in every region of the Commonwealth. The goals of these first meetings have been to introduce the coordinator, to familiarize the coordinator with each program, and to begin identifying and prioritizing the challenges the programs face.

3. *Participate in the development of hospital protocols and guidelines for treatment of survivors of sexual assault in partnership with the Department of Health.*

The coordinator is in communication with staff from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and has been attending the meetings of the Task Force on Services for Survivors of Sexual Assault, coordinated by VDH.

¹ 2020 Session, HB 475 (Mullin) and SB 373 (Deeds); 2020 Appropriations Act Item 404 #1c

4. *Coordinate and strengthen communications among sexual assault nurse examiner medical directors, sexual assault response teams, and hospitals for existing and developing sexual assault nurse examiner programs.*

The coordinator has started meeting individually with hospital administrators and department managers across the state. The coordinator is also collaborating with DCJS staff working with Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) throughout Virginia.

5. *Provide technical assistance for existing and developing sexual assault forensic examiner programs, including local sexual assault forensic examiner training programs*

The coordinator has received feedback from FNE programs that they would like to participate in a quarterly forum for all of the FNE program coordinators across the state. One of the functions of these forums would be to provide technical assistance. The coordinator is in the initial planning stages for this.

6. *Create and maintain a statewide list, updated biannually, to include the following:*
 - a. *A list of available sexual assault forensic examiners, sexual assault nurse examiners, sexual assault forensic nurse examiners, and pediatric sexual assault nurse examiners;*
 - b. *The location and facility affiliation of each examiner;*
 - c. *The duty hours for each examiner and affiliated facility for sexual assault exam services; and*
 - d. *The location of available local sexual assault forensic examiner training programs.*

The coordinator has developed a list of contacts and locations for each known FNE program. The coordinator is also gathering information and designing questions to include as part of a formal survey of FNE programs, to be completed in partnership with the DCJS Criminal Justice Research Center.

The remaining four statutory responsibilities are listed below. Activities for these responsibilities will begin as continued progress is made on responsibilities one through six.

7. *Coordinate, share, and disseminate the list created pursuant to subdivision 6 to the emergency operations communications system available to emergency medical services and law-enforcement agencies as well as the internal emergency and hospital communications system;*
8. *Share and disseminate the list created pursuant to subdivision 6 with all other relevant agencies, including law-enforcement agencies, attorneys for the Commonwealth, victim-witness programs, sexual assault service organizations, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Education, and school divisions;*
9. *Create sexual assault nurse examiner recruitment materials for universities and colleges with nursing programs in partnership with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia; and*
10. *Support and coordinate community education and public outreach, when appropriate, relating to sexual assault nurse examiner issues for the Commonwealth.*