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Office of the Texas Governor Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force

Welcome to the June 2023 issue of the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force (SASTF) newsletter! We are pleased to bring you the latest SASTF news and updates, along with information on the 88th Legislature and the status of bills that were filed incorporating our policy recommendations.

We extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to all Task Force members, working group members, and subject matter experts who contributed to our recommendations over the past two years, and who continue to inform our work on behalf of Texas' sexual assault survivors.

Together, we will continue to ensure that Texas leads the nation through a survivor-centered, trauma-informed approach to sexual violence, where adult and child survivors are heard, believed and supported, where offenders are held accountable, and where all system partners work collaboratively to transform Texas' response to sexual violence.

~ SASTF

Texas 88th Legislative Session - SASTF Policy Recommendations

The Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force included **12** policy recommendation in the [2022 Biennial Report to the Texas Legislature](#). The following bills included SASTF recommendations and have been signed by the Governor.

- [Senate Bill 1401](#) by Sens. Judith Zaffirini & Angela Paxton [House sponsor: Rep. Ann Johnson]; Effective September 1, 2023.

- Increases access to forensic medical examinations by ensuring survivors (or the survivor's parent/guardian in child sexual abuse cases) and their medical providers have ultimate discretion over the performance of a forensic medical exam. Law enforcement will be required to refer all survivors, including child victims of sexual assault in non-acute circumstances, to an exam provider within 120 hours of the assault.
- Removes all statutory reference to the OAG Law Enforcement Request Form, which became functionally obsolete after changes to the law in 2019 regarding the reimbursement process for forensic medical exams.
- Refines crime victims' compensation (CVC) eligibility and reimbursement procedures by clarifying that sexual assault survivors who undergo a forensic medical exam have cooperated with law enforcement for purposes of CVC eligibility.
- Provides for survivor-centered sexual assault kit notification procedures by continuing to allow survivors who have chosen not to report their sexual assault to receive system generated emails and text communications from the electronic Track-Kit system. These procedures respect survivors' desire for confidentiality while also satisfying DPS notification requirements related to the lifespan of a sexual assault examination kit.
- [Senate Bill 1402](#) by Sens. Judith Zaffirini & Angela Paxton [House sponsor: Rep. Donna Howard]; Effective September 1, 2023.
 - Mandates the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE), in collaboration with the SASTF, to establish a training program that includes best practices to effectively recognize, investigate, and document child sexual abuse and adult sexual assault cases. The established curriculum must be at least 8 hours in length. All new Texas law enforcement will be required to undergo this training as part of the Basic Peace Officer's Course *and* all existing Texas law enforcement will be required to engage in this training in accordance with the timelines articulated in the bill.

- Removes the current four-year expiration date of the SASTF so that the necessary and important work of the SASTF may continue.
 - Aligns the statutory membership of the Task Force to include key stakeholder and survivor representation.
 - Allows for travel reimbursement for citizen participants who are requested by the Office of the Governor for travel for relevant SASTF meetings.
 - Mandates that certain emergency room personnel, including nurses and administrative staff, receive training on survivor-centered, trauma-informed care to sexual assault victims and information on the rights of survivors.
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Special Thanks to our SASTF Steering Committee Members, Task Force Members, and Working Group Members who testified during Session!

Members of the Prosecutor Working Group testified on behalf of HB 2696 (Consent). Huge thank you to Lavinia Masters, Tiffany Larson, Liz Boyce, Lindsay Richards, and Justin Wood for testifying during the House Criminal Justice Committee Hearing in April!

SASTF Member Jenny Black and SASTF Steering Committee Member Rose Luna testified on behalf of bills containing SASTF policy recommendations, and SASTF Member Gretchen Grigsby (TCOLE) stood ready to testify as a resource witness. Thank you, Jenny, Rose, and Gretchen!



(Left to Right: Lavinia Masters - SASTF Member, Tiffany Larson - Prosecutor Working Group Member, Liz Boyce - SASTF Steering Committee Member, Representative Donna Howard – District 48, Lindsay Richards - Prosecutor Working Group Member, Justin Wood - SASTF Steering Committee Member)



(Left to Right: Justin Wood - SASTF Steering Committee Member, Rep. Ann Johnson (Houston), Rose Luna – SASTF Steering Committee Member, Liz Boyce - SASTF Steering Committee)

Task Force Member Spotlight



Justin Wood

General Counsel & Vice-President of External Relations
Children's Advocacy Center of Texas (CACTX)

Justin Wood has been a proud member of the CACTX team for almost four years, serving as General Counsel and Vice-President of External Relations where he handles legal and public policy matters, as well as statewide partner relations for the 70-member network of child advocacy centers throughout Texas. Being able to advocate for children and families impacted by abuse in his roles at CACTX is a culmination of his 20 plus years of public service where he has had the opportunity to be a voice for crime victims as a long-time prosecutor in both Harris County and Travis County. Justin is also a policy nerd at heart, having worked in or around public policy for a large part of his career and served as Director of the Criminal Justice Committee in the Texas Senate during the 86th legislative session. Justin hails from West Texas which sparked his love for wide open spaces, he is a proud Texas Aggie, but an even more proud dog dad to Boots.



Elizabeth

"Liz"

Boyce

General Counsel and Director of Policy and Advocacy
Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA)

Elizabeth "Liz" Boyce is the General Counsel and Director of Policy and Legal at the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA). Elizabeth has advocated for survivors for over 20 years, both in private practice and at non-profit organizations such as Texas Advocacy Project and Texas Legal Services Center, where she headed up the crime victims program, focusing on victims of sexual assault, family violence, stalking and human trafficking. At TAASA, Elizabeth's work centers survivors in the areas of public policy advocacy, research, education, and collaboration with statewide partners including the Sexual Assault Survivors Task Force, housed in the Office of the Governor.

New Survivor Leaders

In April, the SASTF asked Task Force members, working group members, and current survivor leaders to nominate new survivor leaders with lived experience to participate as subject matter experts (SMEs) in the Task Force's focused working groups. The SASTF plans to onboard new survivor leaders before the Fall of '23. These survivor partners will serve as SMEs who lend their expertise as advisors and sounding boards for direction, projects, and contributing members of SASTF working groups.

University of North Texas Health Science Center - Center for Human Identification to start Forensic Genetic Genealogy Unit

Ever since the revelation that Joseph James DeAngelo was identified by Forensic Genetic Genealogy (FGG) methods to be the Golden State Serial Killer, hundreds of unsolved cases, from unidentified human remains to unsolved serial sexual predators, have been resolved with this approach. A recent study estimated about 35% of cases resolved using FGG were from individuals who, for a variety of reasons, were never enrolled into the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Combined DNA Index System (CODIS). CODIS is the computer software program that operates local, state, and national databases of DNA profiles from convicted offenders, unsolved crime scene evidence, and missing persons.

The Center for Human Identification (CHI) on the campus of the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth has implemented a Forensic Genetic Genealogy (FGG) unit as part of its normal casework operations. The laboratory is currently preparing for an external audit by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) National Accreditation Board. Once approved, CHI will become the first publicly accredited crime laboratory in the U.S. to conduct FGG testing. CHI plans to offer this technology to the hundreds of law enforcement agencies across Texas at no cost, and to assist partners in the resolution of thousands of cases that have gone without answers for far too long.

Contact Information:

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Task Force Members in the Field

End Violence Against Women's International Conference



Nicole Martinez (Office of the Governor) and Justin Wood (CACTX and SASTF Steering Committee Member) co-presented a session titled, "*Cultivating Culture Change & Improving Collaboration among Criminal Justice Professionals*" at the 2023 End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) Conference in Chicago, IL this April.

Dr. Stacey Mitchell (Texas A&M University – Center of Excellence in Forensic Nursing and SASTF Member) presented with Kathy Bell (Tulsa Police Department), Diana Faugno (Academy of Forensic Nursing), Tamara Jackson (Academy of Forensic Nursing), Jaclyn Rodriguez (Office of the Illinois Attorney General), and Valerie Sievers (Academy of Forensic Nursing) a session titled, "*Forensic Nurse Case Review*" at the 2023 EVAWI Conference.

Adult Forensic Interviewing Program Coming to Brazos County

Texas A&M Health School of Nursing - Center of Excellence in Forensic Nursing (CEFN) is partnering with Brazos County District Attorney's Office, local law enforcement agencies, victim advocacy service providers, and Scotty's House in the development of an adult forensic interviewing program. Modeled after interviews performed at children's advocacy centers, this program aims to make available unbiased, trauma-informed forensic interviews for adults who have experienced sexual or intimate partner violence. Community stakeholders are involved in designing the specialized training for the adult forensic interviewer.

Project Beloved, a nonprofit based in Fort Worth, created plans for the rooms to ensure they reflect a trauma informed design. Elements such as weighted blankets, alternate light sources and diffusers are included to reduce stress and anxiety for the client. Additionally, Project Beloved donated furnishings for one of the two Soft Interview Rooms. Beautiful art, photographs taken by Megan Getrum, hangs in both rooms and was also provided by Project Beloved.

The project hopes to begin serving Brazos County by late fall 2023.



(Left to Right: Max Matheson - Aggie student, Mallery Stroh - Aggie student, Tracy Matheson – SASTF Member, Brazos County D.A. Jarvis Parsons – SASTF Member, Noel Fleming, Chris Miller, Dr. Stacey Mitchell – TAMU & SASTF Member

Special Thanks to our Survivor Panelists!

We would like to extend thanks and gratitude to the following Task Force and working group members who participated in the Survivor Panel at the April SASTF Quarterly Meeting: Abbie Hillis, Marcus Reese, Larissa Martinez, Dr. Peta-Gay Ledbetter, and Deepika Modali.

It is a privilege to be able to listen and learn from those with lived experience and to allow that knowledge and insight to guide the SASTF as we work collaboratively to transform Texas' response to sexual violence.



Training Opportunities

2023 Campus Advocacy Conference: Advancing Advocacy through Community* *This is a hybrid conference, offering in-person and virtual attendance.*

University of Texas at El Paso: El Paso Natural Gas Conference Center – El Paso, Texas June 28 – 29, 2023

[Campus Advocacy Conference Registration](#)

**2023 Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA) Conference:
Think Beyond**

Embassy Suites by Hilton Denton Convention Center – Denton, Texas
July 16 – 19, 2023

[TAASA Conference Registration](#)

2023 Crimes Against Children Conference

Sheraton Dallas – Dallas, Texas
August 6 – 10, 2023

[Crimes Against Children Conference Website](#)

