

# **Sabine County and San Augustine County Sexual Assault Response Team 2025 Biennial Report**

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## Executive Summary

The Sabine and San Augustine County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is guided by the principles of survivor rights and responsibilities, accountability, prevention, and collaboration. Our protocol is an active, victim-focused model that implements the delivery of services to victims of sexual assault. The objectives of this report are to review existing protocols, report mandated members' data regarding sexual assaults in Sabine and San Augustine Counties, discuss the challenges and successes experienced, and explore recommendations for future collaboration.

### SART Overview

The Sabine and San Augustine County SART's mission is to reduce the trauma suffered by victims of sexual assault and to provide the support and resources needed for healing. The team will support the investigative/court process by enhancing the quality of evidence collection and successfully prosecuting sexual assault cases in Sabine and San Augustine Counties. Our ongoing goals are:

- To become familiar with the roles and responsibilities of each first responder/discipline.
- Develop protocols for a seamless response that ensures that victims and responders are well-informed and that the needs of the victim and the criminal justice system are considered throughout the legal process.
- Identify the available resources, avoid duplication, and collaborate on effective delivery of services.
- Develop relationships with individual responders and the agencies they represent so that optimum referrals and information can be provided to each other and the victim.
- Share information, knowledge, and expertise between members.
- Establish rapport with individual responders and the agencies they represent so that there is the best opportunity for resolution in the event of a challenge or miscommunication.
- Educate collaborative partners and the public to increase awareness of the scope of the problem, identify solutions, and provide leadership in prevention efforts.

The guidelines below are the minimum standards for an Adult Sexual Assault by the Sabine and San Augustine County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) as stated in the Local Government Code, Chapter 351, Subchapter J.

§1. Membership: (a) According to Texas Local Government Code, Chapter 351, Subchapter J, it is required for each Commissioner's Court of a county to establish an Adult Sexual Assault Response Team with the following minimum of members: (1) The Chief Administrator of a Sexual Assault Program that provides services within the county or their designee; (2) A prosecutor with jurisdiction over adult sexual assault cases in the county; (3) The Sheriff of the county, or their designee; (4) The chief of the largest municipal law enforcement agency, if one exists, or their designee; (5) A Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner, Forensic Examiner that provides exams within the county, or if they do not exist, a representative from the largest healthcare provider in the county; (6) A mental or behavioral health provider within the county, or if they do not exist, a representative from the public health department; and (7) Other persons or professionals the SART considers necessary for the operation of the response team.

§2. Meetings: (a) The SART shall meet: (1) at least quarterly at a time determined by the presiding officer; (2) not later than the 90th day after the last day of a regular legislative session to review and amend as necessary any protocols, forms, or guidelines developed under this subchapter; and (3) at any other time at the call of the presiding officer. (b) If a response team member cannot participate in a response team meeting, the member or entity the member is representing may designate another

individual to represent the member or entity at the meeting. However, each member or a designee of that member must participate in all response team meetings. (c) A response team member must attend the quarterly meetings held to participate in response team functions, as required under Section 351.254(a)(1), Local Government Code. (d) A response team shall meet independently of a children's advocacy center multidisciplinary team described by Section 264.406, Family Code. 6

§3. Commissioner's Court: (a) Must fill a vacancy for a response team member not later than the 30th day after the date the vacancy occurs and in the same manner as the original appointment.

§4. Protocols: (a) A response team shall develop a written protocol addressing the coordinated response for adult survivors in the county that includes: (1) the procedures to be used in investigating and prosecuting cases arising from a report of sexual assault; (2) interagency information sharing, in accordance with state and federal law, to ensure the timely exchange of relevant information and enhance the response to survivors; (3) the location and accessibility of sexual assault forensic examinations; (4) information on the availability of and access to medical care when the care is clinically indicated; (5) a requirement to ensure survivors are offered access to sexual assault program advocates, as defined by Section 420.003, Government Code; (6) information on the availability of and access to mental and behavioral health services; (7) a requirement to ensure that relevant law enforcement agencies notify survivors promptly regarding the status of any criminal case and court proceeding; (8) an assessment of relevant community trends, including drug-facilitated sexual assault, the incidence of predatory date rape, and sex trafficking; (9) a biennial evaluation through sexual assault case reviews of the effectiveness of individual agency and interagency protocols and systems; (10) at least four hours of annual cross-agency training on the dynamics of sexual assault for response team members participating in the quarterly meetings as required by Section 351.254(c); and (11) procedures for addressing conflicts within the response team and maintaining the confidentiality of information shared among response team members as required by law. (b) In developing a protocol under this section, the response team: (1) shall consider Chapter 56A, Code of Criminal Procedure; (2) may provide different procedures for use within a particular municipality or area of the county served by the response team; and (3) shall prioritize the health and safety of survivors. (c) The protocol developed under this section aims to ensure coordination between all agencies involved in sexual assault cases to increase the response efficacy and minimize survivor traumatization. The response team shall provide the protocol to each agency in the county that responds to disclosures of sexual assault. (d) Failure to follow a protocol developed under this section does not: (1) constitute the basis for a claim or defense to a civil or criminal action; or (2) preclude the admissibility of evidence.

§5. Reports: (a) Not later than December 1 of each odd-numbered year, a response team shall provide to the Commissioner's Court of each county the response team serves a report that includes: (1) a list of response team members able to participate in the quarterly meetings required by Section 351.254(c); (2) a copy of the written protocol developed under Section 351.256; and (3) either: (A) a biennial summary detailing: (i) the number of sexual assault reports received by local law enforcement agencies; (ii) the number of investigations conducted as a result of those reports; (iii) the number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition of those cases; and (iv) the number of reports of sexual assault for which no indictment was presented; or (B) an explanation of the reason the response team failed to provide the information described by Subsection (a)(3)(A).

Our response team consists of the following organizations:

- Burke Mental Health Services

- CHI St. Luke's San Augustine
- Family Crisis Center of East Texas
- Forensic/SANE Nurse Coordinator
- Sabine County District Attorney's Office
- Sabine County Hospital
- Sabine County Judge
- Sabine County Sheriff's Office
- San Augustine County District Attorney's Office
- San Augustine County Judge
- San Augustine County Sheriff's Office
- San Augustine Police Department

#### **Activities and Training**

The Janelle Grum Family Crisis Center of East Texas hosts an annual training called the Safer East Texas Training (SETT). This training consists of experts sharing their knowledge and real-world professional experiences surrounding sexual assault, dual victimizations, human trafficking, and other related topics to increase a victim-centered approach in our community. This training provides the 4 hours of required training detailed in the SART protocol. Almost all of our SART team members attended the 2025 training held in June. While some of our team members receive sexual assault training from their respective organizations, the Family Crisis Center of East Texas will continue to offer the training hours to meet this need. The Safer East Texas Training in 2026 is scheduled for Wednesday, June 10, 2026.

#### **Data and Findings**

All data reported is from January 1, 2024, to November 2025.

The Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner who serves Sabine and San Augustine Counties reported zero adult SANE exams completed for survivors in Sabine County in 2024, and one SANE exam completed for a survivor in San Augustine County in 2024. In 2025, she reported having done zero SANE exams for Sabine County and two for San Augustine County from 1/1/25 to 10/28/25. These numbers do not deviate from the numbers reported in the Sabine and San Augustine County Biennial Reports in 2023.

The Sabine County Sheriff's Office shared that they received zero reports of adult sexual assault from 1/1/24 to 11/11/25. They do not have any SANE kits in their possession past the statutory timeline for transfer to the crime lab. These numbers do not deviate from the numbers reported in the Sabine and San Augustine County Biennial Reports in 2023.

The San Augustine Police Department shared that they have received two reports of adult sexual assault from 1/1/24 to 11/4/25. Both cases were investigated. They do not have any SANE kits in their

possession past the statutory timeline for transfer to the crime lab. These numbers do not deviate from the numbers reported in the Sabine and San Augustine County Biennial Reports in 2023.

The San Augustine County Sheriff's Office shared that they had two reports of adult sexual assault made in 2024, and one made from 1/1/24 to 10/27/25. All of these cases were investigated. They do not have any SANE kits in their possession past the statutory timeline for transfer to the crime lab. These numbers do not deviate from the numbers reported in the Sabine and San Augustine County Biennial Reports in 2023.

The Sabine and San Augustine County District Attorney's Office reported that they have had one adult sexual assault case in Sabine County since 1/1/24, and this case has been indicted. They reported having zero cases in San Augustine County since 1/1/24.

Burke was unable to submit adult sexual assault data for this report due to the wording in the assessment with which they gather their information. Their Adult Needs and Strengths Assessment states, "At any point in your lifetime, have you experienced sexual assault?" Due to there not being a clear way to determine whether the patient is indicating they experienced this as a child or as an adult, we were unable to include the data.

The Family Crisis Center of East Texas served one adult sexual assault survivor in Sabine County and one in San Augustine County in 2024. They served two adult sexual assault survivors in Sabine County and one in San Augustine County from 1/1/25 to 11/12/25. On-call advocates accompanied zero survivors from Sabine County during their SANE exams and one survivor from San Augustine in 2024. On-call advocates accompanied zero survivors from Sabine County and two survivors from San Augustine from 1/1/25 to 11/12/25.

The Sabine County Hospital reported that they have not had any adults disclose that they have been sexually assaulted while in their care from 1/1/24 to 10/13/25.

#### **Sabine and San Augustine County SART Protocols**

##### **STANDARDS OF PRACTICE**

Adult Patients with a Complaint of Sexual Assault Recommendations are to medical, legal, law enforcement, advocacy, and forensic science professionals on the identification, collection, and preservation of physical evidence and the minimization of physical and psychological trauma to adult victims/survivors of sexual assault and Requirements of ECP kits as designated by Chapter 420, Government Code.

To ensure timely Medical Forensic Examination of adults who present with a complaint of sexual assault, Hospitals and/or Law Enforcement contact the Family Crisis Center of East Texas's 24-Hour Hotline at 1-800-828-7233.

##### **MAINTAINING THE SART AND COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS**

The SART Leadership Team, consisting of executive leadership from each SART member agency, meets biannually to assess the process's quality assurance and strategize areas for enhancement. Each SART Leadership Team meeting is led by the Chief Administrator of the Family Crisis Center of East Texas and is a formal, collaborative space where members can discuss the successes and challenges agencies face in responding (individually and collectively) to reports of sexual assault. Meeting topics include, but are not limited to:

- Policy and protocol development, review, and adoption: The SART members develop policies and protocols that specify how sexual assault responders from each agency respond to sexual assault cases and victims.
- Multidisciplinary trainings: different sexual assault response stakeholder groups that belong to the SART cross-train one another about their roles and limitations in responding to sexual assault and share their expertise with other team members.
- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): develop new or update existing MOUs between sexual assault response organizations to formalize agreements. MOU included in Appendix A.
- Formal program evaluation: Systematic analysis of data helps the SART understand how the team works, the impact it has on the community and potential areas of improvement.
- Regular Review: The SART Protocol is reviewed every two years to ensure it is consistent with best practices and member agencies' policies and procedures for sexual assault response.

#### **Conflict Resolution**

If any claim arising out of or relating to this MOU or a breach thereof, the parties will consult with each other to reach a satisfactory solution. The parties hereto shall use their best efforts to amicably and mutually resolve any dispute, litigation, matter, doubt or divergence of any nature, directly or indirectly related to this Agreement ("Conflict"), involving any of the parties.

#### **Confidentiality**

Maintain confidentiality of all communications, information, and observations made by SART members.

#### **POINT OF ENTRY PROTOCOLS**

For Sabine and San Augustine County SART purposes, the point of entry is considered the first agency to whom a victim discloses a sexual assault and has the ability and responsibility to provide short and long-term support. Sabine and San Augustine have three formal points of entry: Law Enforcement, The Family Crisis Center of East Texas, and Hospital/Healthcare Provider.

#### **POINT OF ENTRY: LAW ENFORCEMENT – RECOMMENDED PROTOCOL FOR RESPONDING OFFICER**

If the assault occurred less than one hundred twenty hours (120) from the report, the agency receiving the report should immediately call the Family Crisis Center of East Texas's Hotline at 1-800-828-7233 to schedule a medical forensic examination by the on-call SANE.

- Law Enforcement may transfer or follow the patient to the SANE suite for the medical forensic exam (MFE). Law Enforcement presence is no longer required for the authorization of the exam if the victim is reporting the assault, but they may be able to provide important information for the SANE.
- If the victim presents with trauma, the agency receiving the initial report may refer the patient to the closest Emergency Department of choice for immediate assessment and treatment. Once cleared medically, the patient may transfer to the SANE suite, where the on-call SANE performs the medical forensic exam (MFE).
- Law Enforcement personnel is not permitted to be present (in the room) during the actual exam unless requested explicitly by the SANE staff member. However, Law Enforcement personnel may be asked to remain on the premises for safety reasons and the support of the SANE Program staff.

If the victim does not need or want a forensic exam, Law Enforcement provides information about community resources, such as the Family Crisis Center of East Texas Hotline, for short- and long-term support. The Family Crisis Center provides Law Enforcement with resource information for victims.

### **Law Enforcement**

The primary objectives for a law enforcement officer in any sexual assault case are to: identify information that supports the facts of the case, identify and preserve evidence, identify the offender, and develop probable cause to support the arrest and prosecution of the offender. Law enforcement officers should use a victim-centered approach to achieve these objectives.

Since many sexual assault victims will experience their first real contact with a law enforcement officer following the assault, the law enforcement officer should be ever cognizant of the emotional well-being of the victim and should take all reasonable steps to alleviate the negative impact of the investigative process.

The officer(s) should remain mindful that law enforcement is just one component of a Multidisciplinary Team. The team concept is crucial in ensuring a victim-centered approach to the investigation.

The Victim-Centered Approach means that the needs and interests of survivors are of central concern to system personnel in the response. For a law enforcement officer, this means:

1. Enhancing cooperation between the law enforcement agency and community organizations that may assist the victim(s).
2. Giving victims choices and options whenever possible.
3. Demonstrating sensitivity by using non-judgmental questions, comments, and body language.
4. Establishing and maintaining liaisons with law enforcement commands, Crime Victim Liaisons, and specialized units such as Sexual Assault Programs, Advocacy Centers, Child and Adult Protective Services, and community medical/forensic services.
5. Facilitating communication within the law enforcement agency and among members of the Multidisciplinary Team.
6. Maintaining respect for the survivor in interdisciplinary communication.
7. Avoiding premature judgments. Sexual assault cases often seem counterintuitive at first. Victims may wait days, weeks, months, or even years before reporting their assault. The victim may seem inappropriately calm and lack signs of a physical struggle (e.g., cuts, bruises, or abrasions). It is important to withhold judgment about the case and the victim until sufficient evidence is collected. If you believe a victim may be making a false statement or report, remain respectful.

These protocol items are not intended to serve as a detailed guide to investigating sexual assault. Still, they should provide sufficient information to ensure that the law enforcement officer takes a victim-centered approach. For more specific investigative instruction, the law enforcement officer should refer to the Texas Evidence Collection Protocol available through the Texas Office of the Attorney General: [www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/crime-victims/TECP.pdf](http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/crime-victims/TECP.pdf).

## POINT OF ENTRY: FAMILY CRISIS CENTER OF EAST TEXAS HOTLINE:

The Family Crisis Center of East Texas Hotline receives the call, assesses the caller's needs and presents resources and options based on the unique experiences of the individual caller.

- Unique experiences such as specific medical needs, amount of time since the assault, and the nature of the assault dictates short and long-term options. The Crisis Worker contacts the designated SANE on-call.
- If the caller discloses a sexual assault and wants to move forward with a medical forensic exam (MFE), Hotline staff contacts the on-call SANE. The SANE assesses if medical clearance is necessary.
- If the caller does not want a medical forensic exam, the Hotline staff continues to support the caller throughout the crisis with short and long-term referrals for mental, medical, legal support, and safety planning.
- If the caller requests to make a report to Law Enforcement, the Family Crisis Center of East Texas staff reaches out to Law Enforcement.
- The caller does not have to report to Law Enforcement to be eligible for advocacy or medical services.
- The caller can request to report to Law Enforcement without a medical forensic exam. Hotline staff supports the caller in locating the information needed to make a report.

### Family Crisis Center of East Texas

The Family Crisis Center of East Texas is dedicated to providing superior services to those who have suffered from sexual violence and taking a holistic approach to help clients transition from victim to survivor. The services offered by advocates include, but are not limited to:

- Emergency Shelter
- Medical Accompaniment On Sexual Assault
- Examinations (SANE)
- Crisis Intervention
- Safety Planning
- Personal and Legal Advocacy
- Court Accompaniment
- Protective Order Assistance
- Support Groups
- Criminal Justice System Support
- Assistance Filing for Human Trafficking Visa
- Peer Support
- Assistance with Crime Victims Compensation
- Counseling
- College/University Campus Advocacy
- Primary Prevention
- Community Education

### Forensic Nurse Examiners

Forensic nurses certified as sexual assault nurse examiners (SANEs) receive extensive training and follow scientific and legal procedures to collect evidence and ensure the quality of care for the victims. SANEs

are registered nurses trained to assess specific needs and provide holistic healing care to patients requesting medical care and evidence collection due to an assault or abuse.

Regardless of whether a victim is willing to report the crime to law enforcement, victims have the right to seek medical attention and evidence collection in the form of a medical forensic exam.

SANEs gather a history for diagnosis and treatment, assess for trauma, gather evidence as indicated, photo document injuries, answer questions, and discuss patient options.

Competency of care requires ongoing education and certification to maintain standards of practice. Suggested training/ certifications are as follows:

1. Certification through the Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) includes but is not limited to:

- a. Didactic training
- b. Preceptorship
- c. Court preparation

2. Certification through the International Association of Forensic Nursing (IAFN)

3. Follow guidelines and requirements within the Forensic Nursing Program of Family Crisis Center.

**Nursing:** Nurses employed and by contract will adhere to the Nursing Practice Act set forth by the Texas Board of Nursing. Current licensure is required through the Texas BON.

Health professionals should remember that medical care and forensic evidence collection are but one component of a multidisciplinary team's response to sexual assault. The team concept is crucial in ensuring a Victim-Centered Approach to the response.

The Victim-Centered Approach means that the needs and interests of the sexual assault patient are of central concern to system personnel as they respond. For healthcare providers, this means they will:

1. Be an advocate for the patient's physical and psychosocial well-being.
2. Provide the patient with a safe, secure, and private place for their exam and treatment.
3. Ensure patient confidentiality is maintained.
4. Ensure that the medical forensic examination is conducted with the patient providing continued consent throughout the process.

Exams are to be performed at one of the SANE suites unless medically unable to transfer. Agreements with local hospitals allow the Family Crisis Center of East Texas/contracted SANEs access to perform the medical forensic exam at their facility if the patient cannot transfer. General recommendations for the medical forensic examination are outlined below. In addition, detailed steps for collecting forensic evidence are provided in the Texas Evidence Collection Protocol.

The examination is, first and foremost, a medical examination assessing for traumatic injuries. It is an integral part of the medical process that provides comprehensive care to the patient. The examination involves:

1. Assessment, such as gathering information concerning the patient's medical condition (history)
2. Formulating a diagnosis
3. Formulating a nursing care plan

4. Intervention and care of injuries, collection of forensic evidence, patient education, safety, and assessment for referrals
5. Reviewing the process to ensure all the patient's needs are addressed and referrals are made.

Medical Forensic Examination includes four parts:

1. A detailed history of the patient
2. A head-to-toe examination assessing for trauma
3. A detailed anogenital examination assessing for trauma
4. Identification and collection of forensic evidence and presentation in legal proceedings.

Treatment Protocols:

1. The patient is treated prophylactically for sexually transmitted infections, per the CDC guidelines. Treatment may be from a presenting hospital, referral to Angelina County and Cities Health District, or another provider as requested by the patient.
2. Discuss pregnancy risk probability. Provide for assessment of and intervention as requested per guidelines.

#### **POINT OF ENTRY: HOSPITAL/HEALTHCARE PROVIDER**

While it is not a formal point of entry for sexual assault services, some victims may present at the local hospital for immediate medical services after an assault.

- The patient should be seen by a healthcare provider within 15 minutes of arrival or as soon as possible.
- Patient is assessed for appropriate immediate medical care needs. It is recommended for all adult patients to be cleared medically at an Emergency Department before the transfer to a SANE suite for the medical forensic exam (MFE). The SANE suite is not an acute care medical facility. Victims who are not considered medically stable are referred to a local Emergency Department for treatment before a medical forensic exam by a SANE may be performed.
- Emergency Department staff are trained to discuss three options with the patient:
  - o Connecting victims with Law Enforcement to make a report.
  - o Contacting Family Crisis Center Hotline for a Reporting medical forensic examination by a certified SANE.
  - o Contacting Family Crisis Center Hotline for a Non-Reporting medical forensic examination by a certified SANE.

#### **Hospital/Healthcare Provider**

Healthcare providers may be the first professionals victims encounter following a sexual assault. The hospital/healthcare facility triage provides a designated liaison to participate actively on the Sexual Assault Response Team. As appropriate, the hospital/healthcare provider participates in cross-training with allied professionals regarding response to sexual assault. This allows for the SANE to educate hospital staff on procedures for caring for adult sexual assault patients. Providers train staff on techniques for providing victim-centered care. Patients first presenting to the hospital/healthcare must be medically cleared while maintaining evidence. Reports of services provided, including treatment of injuries or prophylactic medications, are to be called to the on-call SANE or sent in writing to the patient with instructions to present to the SANE. Providers supply information to patients regarding medical forensic

examinations. Providers contact the Family Crisis Center of East Texas Hotline at 1-800-828-7233 if not already contacted by law enforcement.

#### **Mental Healthcare Provider**

Mental Health Provider (MHP) representative involvement on SART teams is to improve response to acute mental health needs of a patient who has experienced sexual assault. MHP evaluation of the patient includes acute care assessment and post-assault follow-up based on the patient's needs. In addition, Mental Healthcare Providers serve as a resource to the survivor/patient and members of the SART.

#### **Prosecutors**

Prosecutors provide for the community's and victim's safety by holding offenders accountable by prosecuting criminal cases. On a SART, prosecutors provide feedback to agencies on trials and judicial outcomes and how the work of other agencies can affect the prosecution of cases. Prosecutors will:

- Provide legal guidance to local law enforcement agencies concerning the sufficiency of the evidence, warrants, and similar matters relating to investigating criminal cases.
- Evaluate cases submitted by law enforcement to determine if there is sufficient evidence for prosecution.
- Provide Victim-Centered Prosecution
  - o Although prosecutors are not victims' attorneys, they can advocate for victims' rights and proactively address victims' concerns. For example, many victims are unfamiliar with the criminal justice process. Most have not been to court before. They may be highly apprehensive about seeing offenders in close proximity, fear testifying about the details of their assaults, and worry about an adversarial cross-examination process. To overcome these concerns, prosecutors can help victims by orienting them to the criminal justice system, providing waiting areas separate from offenders, and working with advocates to help meet victims' emotional needs.

#### **Non-Reporting Sexual Assault**

An adult patient without an intellectual disability between the ages of 18-65 who presents with sexual assault may choose whether or not they report to law enforcement. The Non-Reported Sexual Assault Evidence Program was created in House Bill 2626 by the 81st Legislature in 2009. A non-reporting medical forensic examination may be conducted utilizing the same process and care as provided to someone who decides to move forward through the legal process. Evidence is gathered per the Texas Evidence Collection protocol. Guidelines for storing the evidence are set forth by the Texas Office of the Attorney General and the Texas Department of Public Safety. Evidence is not tested and is forwarded to the Texas DPS Bio-Warehouse per guidelines, where it is stored for up to 5 years. This secures the evidence while giving survivors time to consider if they want to report the assault. Victims later deciding to proceed with processing their kit must report to the investigating law enforcement agency of the crime. It is the responsibility of the victim to notify the investigating law enforcement agency of the change of status to a reporting sexual assault and the responsibility of the investigating law enforcement agency to retrieve said evidence and transfer it to the Crime Lab for testing.

#### **Release of Medical Records**

Upon receipt of authorization for the release of medical records, the hospital or physician's office provides copies of all requested documentation pertaining to the examination and treatment of a patient to (1) the child advocacy center; and/or (2) Law Enforcement/prosecution agency.

#### **Ongoing Response**

Regardless of the reporting and disclosure path a victim/survivor chooses, there is community support before, during, and after a report. While some victims/survivors of sexual assault choose not to report the crime, the presence of a SART is associated with higher victim participation in the criminal system, shorter reporting delays, more types of forensic evidence collected, and higher arrest rates.

#### **Individuals with Limited English Proficiency**

All members of the SART utilize language interpreters (in person or on the phone) to support victims with limited or no English proficiency. All efforts are made not to use family or community members to provide interpretive services to a first responder. Using professional interpreters ensures a confidential and safe environment for the victims/survivors to share details about the crime in their primary language.

#### **Individuals Who Are Detained**

Incarcerated individuals have the right to access support services if they are victims of sexual assault under the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). The Family Crisis Center of East Texas is responsible for providing 24/7 telephone support, crisis intervention counseling, emotional support services related to sexual abuse/ harassment, and referrals for a victim when the violence has occurred during detention

#### **Updates to Legislation**

Although many important legislative updates have impacted our SART and will impact it in the future, the SART decided to highlight the following due to their immediate effect on our protocols and efforts.

- SB 608 – Requires SARTs to provide data in their biennial reports about the number of sexual assault forensic exam kits that are past the statutory timelines for transfer to the crime lab. Our SART members who this pertained to were extremely open and willing to report any kits they had that were past the statutory timeline. We are proud to report that Sabine and San Augustine Counties had none in their possession.
- SB 836 – Requires law enforcement to notify rape victims of their right to use a pseudonym and provide that this right can be asserted in the prosecution phase. Our SART spent intentional time educating ourselves on this change, as well as distributing the updated pseudonym forms issued to us by the Office of the Attorney General.
- SB 761 – Grants victims the right to have an attorney present during a forensic interview with law enforcement or with other individuals conducting the interview. Our SART changed the language used in our Notice to Adult Victims of Sexual Assault to explicitly state that victims have this right, and notified our partner law enforcement agencies of the importance.
- HB 1422 – Creates a third option for sexual assault survivors who choose to undergo a forensic examination: the non-report test option. Our SANE nurse has requested training from her peers on how to best implement this change into our protocol, and will train the rest of our SART on it.

#### **Case Review: Evaluation of Protocols**

The Sabine and San Augustine County SART agreed to do our case review on a woman whom we will refer to as BJ. BJ made a report to law enforcement in San Augustine County after her ex-boyfriend sexually assaulted and strangled her. Law enforcement was her point of entry into our SART protocol. Law enforcement scheduled the SANE exam through the Family Crisis Center of East Texas's 24/7 hotline. The Family Crisis Center of East Texas then contacted the on-call SANE and the on-call advocate. The SANE took place within 120 hours of the assaults. During the exam, the nurse assessed BJ for trauma, gathered evidence, documented her injuries, and informed her of the free resources available to her regarding her health and healing.

BJ is working with the Family Crisis Center of East Texas's legal advocate and child advocate. The legal advocate is helping her apply for Crime Victims Compensation to relocate and for lost wages, and the child advocate is helping BJ apply for childcare. Law enforcement was very communicative with BJ during their investigation, and continues to check in with her even now. The case has been submitted to the San Augustine County DA's office.

BJ's case demonstrates how some of our SART protocols work in Sabine and San Augustine Counties. Each mandated member involved worked together to make sure she received the resources and care she needed/wanted. Our team was able to give BJ medical care, legal assistance, and continued crisis intervention and safety planning. Due to confidentiality and the protection of her privacy during the ongoing criminal case, we chose not to include documents and reports pertaining to BJ's case.

### Conclusion

The Sabine and San Augustine County SART has made significant progress in the last two years. We were able to create our own unique Notice to Adult Victims of Sexual Assault, which is a vital tool in connecting survivors to their rights and resources. Mandated members have begun attending meetings consistently and contributing ideas to help expand and improve our protocols for survivors. Increased participation and collaboration have allowed cases to go more smoothly and for community partners to work together more cohesively. This has resulted in survivors being able to pursue justice and assistance faster than in the past.

Our future goals primarily revolve around continuing to adapt our protocols and efforts to what works best for survivors in our community. All of our mandated members have unique training and experiences that make all of us better as a team, and we intend to continue leaning on one another. We also plan to create a new referral system that will make it easier for law enforcement and other community partners to refer survivors to community resources. We hope this will have a positive trickle-down effect and will help survivors buy into the law enforcement investigation, the prosecution process, and most importantly, their future healing.

Due to some mandated members not being able to submit data for both the 2023 and 2025 reports, we plan to explore how they can begin gathering relevant data in the next two years. Some of these members' organizations do not track sexual assaults, while some have wording in their assessments or systems that does not make the data that is gathered usable. We want each mandated member to be represented in this report, and not being able to report their data does not allow us to accurately reflect their important work with survivors. Overall, we hope that the next two years continue to strengthen the Sabine and San Augustine County SART as a team and as collaborators, helping survivors pursue justice and healing.

## APPENDIX

### MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This memorandum of understanding is recognized as a cooperative, collaborative commitment between the San Augustine County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART). The San Augustine County Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is a multidisciplinary collaboration, formed in San Augustine County to facilitate a coordinated community approach dedicated to providing appropriate care of individuals who have been sexually assaulted.

**January 1, 2022 - December 31, 2025**

Each agency indicates their commitment to implementing and maintaining this SART in the following ways:

- Committing to uphold countywide standards of practice to ensure consistent responses to Adults who have been sexually assaulted.
- Develop protocols for coordinated response to sexual assault.
- Conduct at least four hours of annual cross-agency training on the dynamics of sexual assault of each participating agency in the SART approach.
- Assist and train other community organizations responding to sexual assault victims.
- Coordinate immediate response to sexual assault victims.
- Coordinate long-term response to sexual assault victims.
- Identify and implement systems' changes.
- Educate the community about prevention and build community awareness around the issues of sexual assault.
- Providing equal access to services for all individuals regardless of race, ethnicity gender, sexual orientation, income, ability, language, age, religion or other personal characteristics.
- Developing and maintaining professional relationships through respectful communication and cross-disciplinary education among team members.
- Making a commitment to positive, constructive problem-solving for the benefit of victims and the community with conflict resolution.
- Participate in SART planning and implementation activities to ensure smooth operations, problem-solving and case review.
- Maintain confidentiality of all communications, information, and observations made by SART members.