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April 26, 2017

Representative Senfronia Thompson  
Room 3S.6  
P.O. Box 2910  
Austin, TX 78768

Dear Representative Thompson,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports House Bill 3152, which would ensure that medical facilities can assist survivors and provide them with the necessary information and access to medical forensic examinations.

Every year, thousands of sexual assault survivors choose to undergo exhaustive medical forensic exams (MFEs) to collect evidence left behind by their attackers. Being able to access such exams is crucial for survivors; MFEs not only involve the collection of forensic evidence for a rape kit, but also medical and prophylactic treatment related to the attack. Research suggests that having MFEs completed by a specially trained Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE) is associated with an improved likelihood of successful prosecution. To ensure that all sexual assault survivors have equal access to healing and justice, it is important to ensure universal access to high-quality MFEs.

In 2013, the Texas legislature passed S.B. 1191, which aimed to expand access to high-quality MFEs by requiring basic forensic evidence collection training for all emergency department nurses and requiring all hospitals to offer MFEs. H.B. 3152 builds on this goal by requiring the Health and Human Services Commission to designate Texas health care facilities as "SAFE-ready" if they have a trained SAFE available to consult on MFEs. Hospitals that are not SAFE-ready must inform survivors of this fact, provide information on a nearby SAFE-ready hospital, and provide transportation to this hospital, if necessary.

H.B. 3152 also requires that survivors be informed in writing about their right to an MFE and requires the state to publish a list of all SAFE-ready hospitals in the state. These provisions will ensure that survivors are aware of their options and can make informed decisions about their health.

We thank you for your leadership on this bill and offer our assistance to you as you work to ensure survivors of sexual assault receive the competent and compassionate care they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ilse Knecht". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ilse Knecht  
Director, Policy & Advocacy