

**Mercer County**  
**Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE) Commission**  
**Mercer County Service Plan**

**Local Board/SART Overview**

To meet SAFE Commission standards, Mercer County has formalized a coordinated response through the creation of a Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) serving as the local board convened specifically to meet the SAFE Commission's guidelines. Members of this local coordinated response collaboration include:

- Mercer County 911/Dispatch
- Mercer County Prosecuting Attorney's Office
- WVU Medicine – Princeton Community Hospital
- WVU Medicine – Bluefield Regional Medical Center
- Mercer County Sheriff's Department
- Bluefield Police Department
- Bramwell Police Department
- Princeton Police Department
- Child Protect
- Mercer County Health Department
- WV Department of Human Services
- West Virginia State Police
- Athens Police Department
- Mercer County Schools
- Family Refuge Center
- Mercer County EMS

The SART meets/plans to meet monthly with the intent to:

- ☒ Share information and resources
- ☒ Identify gaps in the service delivery system
- ☒ Increase awareness on issues of sexual assault and stalking in the community
- ☒ Increase victim and community safety
- ☒ Develop professional relationships and an understanding of varying roles and responsibilities of first responders
- ☒ Develop, implement, and review county protocol to meet legislative requirements of the SAFE Commission

## ADVOCACY PROTOCOL

### OVERVIEW

**A victim advocate provides free, confidential and non-judgmental emotional support, information, social service referrals and guidance following a sexual assault. A victim advocate's involvement will begin at the time the victim reports the sexual assault and extend beyond the point when other agencies have terminated their involvement. A victim advocate offers the victim the support needed to understand what is happening and make informed decisions.**

**Services can only be provided by trained advocates who have received a minimum of 32 hours of specific sexual assault advocacy training that meets the training standards established by the West Virginia Foundation for Rape Information and Services <http://www.fris.org/>.<sup>1</sup>**

The following seven advocacy services meet core service standards. The following services exist in our county:

- ☒ 24/7 advocacy, support, and accompaniment during the medical forensic exam, law enforcement investigations and court proceedings
  - ☒ Information for victims about reporting/not reporting to law enforcement
  - ☒ Crisis intervention and/or emotional support to victims and their families
  - ☒ Referrals and coordinated services with other agencies
  - ☒ Support for victims through the criminal justice system
  - ☒ Replacement clothing for victims after medical forensic exams, if needed
  - ☒ Protection of victim privacy and confidentiality
- The charge nurse or intake staff at hospital will call the 24/7 hotline to initiate the advocacy protocol. Law enforcement is encouraged to contact the advocate immediately when they first encounter a victim of sexual assault who might need medical attention so the advocate can be at the hospital when the victim arrives.

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<sup>1[1]</sup> In cases of child abuse perpetrated against an adolescent as defined by WV law, the local Child Advocacy Center may also be contacted for support and/or forensic services.

- When the victim advocate is called, they will respond to the hospital within an hour.
- Family Refuge Center 24/7 hotline: 304-645-6334

If the victim goes to the hospital on their own: When a victim presents at the hospital for medical attention or a forensic exam, advocate should be called immediately by the charge nurse or intake staff. If the victim wants to report the assault to law enforcement, they are called to the hospital by the charge nurse so that they can take a statement (advocates encourage law enforcement to wait until the victim has had at least 2 sleep cycles before questioning to allow for the impact of the trauma on the victim's memory). If the victim does not want to report, a non-report kit is completed and sent to Marshall University's Forensic Science Center; law enforcement is not called. If the victim is under the age of 18, law enforcement must be called. A referral to CPS should also be made by law enforcement, the nurse and/or the advocate.

First responders will be informed of this Advocacy Protocol by:

The Mercer County SART team will review the SAFE plan every year during January's meeting (first meeting of the year) and hold an information session during February or March for all first responders in Mercer County. The Prosecuting Attorney's Office will send out a memo to all first responders to invite them to the information session. The Prosecuting Attorney's Office will then follow up the session by sending the plan to all first responding agencies who were unable to send their staff to the information session. In-person conversations with first responders will be held quarterly or as needed to make sure they understand the plan and are sharing it with the rest of their staff. The SART will work with first responders to add the plan to all onboarding procedures. The first responders who need to have access to this plan are the West Virginia State Police – Princeton Detachment, Mercer County Sheriff's Department, Princeton Police Department, Bluefield City Police Department, Athens Police Department, Bramwell Police Department, WVU Medicine - Princeton Community Hospital, WVU Medicine – Bluefield Regional Medical Center, Mercer County 911/Dispatch, Mercer County Schools, Family Refuge Center, Child Protect, Mercer County EMS, Mercer County Health Department and the WV Department of Human Services.

### **Phone number of Rape Crisis Center to Activate Advocacy Protocol:**

**Family Refuge Center: 24/7 hotline 304-645-6334**

## **MEDICAL FORENSIC PROTOCOL**

### **OVERVIEW**

For medical forensic services for adolescent/adult victims within our county services are provided by medical facilities located in our county:

WVU Medicine - Princeton Community Hospital  
122 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Princeton, WV  
304-487-7000

Medical forensic exams are provided by SANEs who are available on-call 24/7.

WVU Medicine - Bluefield Regional Medical Center  
500 Cherry Street  
Bluefield, WV  
304-327-1100 (calls go to Princeton Community Hospital)

Medical forensic exams are provided by SANEs who are available on-call 24/7 and dispatched from Princeton Community Hospital.

First responders will be informed of this Medical Protocol by:

The Mercer County SART team will review the SAFE plan every year during January's meeting (first meeting of the year) and hold an information session during February or March for all first responders in Mercer County. The Prosecuting Attorney's Office will send out a memo to all first responders to invite them to the information session. The Prosecuting Attorney's Office will then follow up the session by sending the plan to all first responding agencies who were unable to send their staff to the information session. In-person conversations with first responders will be held quarterly or as needed to make sure they understand the plan and are sharing it with the rest of their staff. The SART will work with first responders to add the plan to all onboarding procedures. The first responders who need to have access to this plan are the West Virginia State Police – Princeton Detachment, Mercer County Sheriff's Department, Princeton Police Department, Bluefield City Police Department, Athens Police Department, Bramwell Police Department, WVU Medicine - Princeton Community Hospital, WVU Medicine – Bluefield Regional Medical Center, Mercer County 911/Dispatch, Mercer County Schools, Family Refuge Center, Child Protect, Mercer County EMS, Mercer County Health Department and the WV Department of Human Services.

### **Phone numbers to Activate Medical Forensic Protocol:**

**Princeton Community Hospital: 304-487-7000**  
**Or**

**Bluefield Regional Medical Center: 304-372-1100**

## TRANSPORTATION PROTOCOL

### OVERVIEW

The SAFE Commission requires that this transportation protocol must include the following four core components:

1. Accessible transportation, including the ability to transport victims with disabilities
2. Transportation to and from the medical forensic exam, regardless of the victim's ability to pay
3. Plan for victim confidentiality
4. Plan to return the victim to his or her point of origin (or an agreed upon safe place) after the medical forensic examination

IF a sexual assault victim calls 911 needing emergent medical care, EMS and the appropriate law enforcement agency will both respond.

EMS will transport the victim to the appropriate medical facility, where the victim can receive a medical forensic exam. Medical staff will contact Family Refuge Center's 24-hour hotline (304-647-6634) and request the presence of the on-call victim advocate.

IF the victim chooses to initiate a police investigation, the responding law enforcement officer will document and report the incident.

IF a victim chooses NOT to report to law enforcement and would like to have a medical exam but has no transportation, the law enforcement agency will transport the victim to the hospital.

IF the victim chooses NOT to initiate a police investigation, law enforcement will determine the immediate safety and security of the victim and provide contact information should the victim decide to make a report at a later date.

IF the victim has no transportation to return to their point-of-origin or a safe place, the law enforcement agency will transport the victim back to their point-of-origin or to a safe place at no cost to the victim by contacting the Mercer County Sheriff's Department at (304) 487-8364.

IF the victim has a disability and no means of transportation, the law enforcement agency will transport the victim back to the point of origin or to a safe place at no cost to the victim. (i.e., if a victim has a folding wheelchair, law enforcement, with the help of hospital security, will assist the victim into the car and store the wheelchair in the back).

IF a sexual assault victim contacts the Family Refuge Center after a recent assault, the advocate will inform the victim of the medical forensic exam and law enforcement report/non-report options.

IF the victim has emergent medical needs, the advocate will guide the victim to call 911, thereby activating the protocol outlined above. If the victim chooses NOT to report to law enforcement and would like to have a medical forensic examination completed but has no access to transportation, the on-call advocate will activate the transportation protocol outlined above.

First responders will be informed of this Transportation Protocol by:

The Mercer County SART team will review the SAFE plan every year during January's meeting (first meeting of the year) and hold an information session during February or March for all first responders in Mercer County. The Prosecuting Attorney's Office will send out a memo to all first responders to invite them to the information session. The Prosecuting Attorney's Office will then follow up the session by sending the plan to all first responding agencies who were unable to send their staff to the information session. In-person conversations with first responders will be held quarterly or as needed to make sure they understand the plan and are sharing it with the rest of their staff. The SART will work with first responders to add the plan to all onboarding procedures. The first responders who need to have access to this plan are the West Virginia State Police – Princeton Detachment, Mercer County Sheriff's Department, Princeton Police Department, Bluefield City Police Department, Athens Police Department, Bramwell Police Department, WVU Medicine - Princeton Community Hospital, WVU Medicine – Bluefield Regional Medical Center, Mercer County 911/Dispatch, Mercer County Schools, Family Refuge Center, Child Protect, Mercer County EMS, Mercer County Health Department and the WV Department of Human Services.

**Phone numbers to Activate Transportation Protocol:**

**Mercer County 911/Dispatch: 911 or 304-425-8911**

**Mercer County Sheriff's Department: 304-487-8364**