

330 West Broadway
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 531-4040
SanDiegoDA.com



DWAIN D. WOODLEY
ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

September 28, 2022
For Immediate Release

Contact: [Steve Walker](#) (619) 843-7977
[Tanya Sierra](#) (619) 531-3315
En Español [Barbara Medina](#) (619) 531-3305

DA-Sponsored Bill That Gives Life Saving Medical Access to Domestic Violence Victims Signed into Law

AB 2185 Provides Forensic Exams for DV Assault Victims

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) announced today that a bill her office sponsored, giving victims of domestic violence assault equal access to comparable forensic exams that sexual assault victims receive, has been signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom.

Assembly Bill 2185, authored by Assemblymember Dr. Akilah Weber and sponsored by the San Diego County District Attorney's Office, codifies the gold standard of forensic medical examination and documentation, and brings equal access and parity to all victims of domestic violence in California. The new law will promote access and enhance positive health outcomes for domestic violence survivors.

"This new law can save lives," DA Summer Stephan said. "The law provided for sexual assault victims to have access to medical forensic exams and treatment at no cost, but not for domestic violence victims, even though both are at risk for life-threatening injuries. We know that these domestic violence medical evidentiary examinations can be critical, especially in cases of strangulation. I want to thank Assemblymember Akilah Weber, M.D., who immediately saw the great benefit that this law can provide through her unique physician lens, and fought to make this law a reality for vulnerable victims."

Strangulation injuries are often internal with no external visible injuries; making life-threatening injuries easy to miss without proper training for examiners, and immediate assessment, accurate diagnosis, and treatment. Research shows that a victim strangled even one time is 750% more likely to be killed later by her abuser compared to a domestic violence victim who has never been strangled. The percentage is higher if there are multiple strangulation assaults or altered consciousness.

"In San Diego County, the District Attorney's office implemented a countywide pilot program with trained forensic nurse examiners to document strangulation and other injuries from domestic violence assaults through medical evidentiary exams," said Assemblymember Akilah

Weber, M.D. “The evidence proved that the exams coupled with early intervention with counseling and resources for women and families resulted in saving lives. This is why I authored AB 2185 to scale the pilot program statewide and expand access to medical evidentiary examinations for survivors of domestic violence assault to all Californians. AB 2185 will also create a funding system to reimburse qualified healthcare professionals for administering these exams. I appreciate Governor Newsom’s signing the Legislative Women’s Caucus priority bills which underscores California’s commitment to achieving equitable policies for all women.”

In 2016, experts from San Diego County recognized that domestic violence examinations were not being utilized throughout California. In 2017, as part of Cal OES XC grant, San Diego County piloted a program where specially trained forensic nurses were dispatched to law enforcement scenes to better document domestic violence strangulation cases. The purpose of the pilot was to enhance the collective coordinated community response to victims of abuse related assault, to provide those victims with evidentiary exams, and to document strangulation and other injuries free of charge to victims. These examinations increased access to victims and provided awareness about the medical dangers of strangulation incidents. For example, one victim of a serious assault suffered a fractured larynx but didn’t realize it until a forensic nurse performing a medical evidentiary exam, screened her and referred her to the emergency room. The victim could have died had it not been for this intervention.

Specially trained forensic nurses examine the patient/victim, take additional photographs, encourage the victim to seek emergency medical care when necessary, and connect them to local advocacy resources and supportive victim services.

Over 1,000 victims and survivors of abuse across San Diego County have benefitted from forensic domestic violence assault exams, at no cost them. Since the pilot program went into effect, domestic violence homicides dropped by 15% between 2017 and 2020 and those resulting from strangulation also dropped substantially. (San Diego Domestic Violence Fatality Review Team).

#

About the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office

The San Diego County DA’s Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue fair and equal justice, and support victims daily across San Diego County.