



TO: Lieutenant Governor John Rodgers
Senator Ginny Lyons
Senator Robert Norris

FROM: Liz Couto, BSN, RN, CEN, Director-at-Large, Government Affairs Chair, ENA-Vermont

RE: Voices for Vermont Victims Public Hearing regarding S.193: *An Act relating to establishing a forensic facility for certain criminal justice-involved persons*

Date: January 21, 2026

Dear Lieutenant Governor John Rodgers, Senator Ginny Lyons, and Senator Robert Norris,

On behalf of the Vermont Emergency Nurses Association, we thank you for all your work and introduction of S.193, as well as hosting and participating in today's public hearing.

As I have collaborated with Lieutenant Rogers, the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, and the House Committee on Health care regarding the current state of workplace violence in healthcare for successful legislation implementation to support Workplace violence Protection Programs and police response to violent crimes against healthcare workers, we appreciate your acknowledgment and support on this bill to establish a forensic facility.

Vermont remains 1 of only 2 states without a forensic facility and as you heard in today's testimony and in previous testimony by myself and my healthcare colleagues, the victims voice at the table is often left out, leaving the victims short of expected justice and worsening their experience.

Everyone who testified today, and me previously, acknowledges that there are situations that require complex evaluation, consideration, and treatment to support medical needs for complex diagnoses ; we all want those individuals to have those needs met, but we need that to be balanced with the justice system in place to support victims equally. I as a nurse, practice to protect and care for my patients, but not at the expense of our safety and lives. Emergency Departments have become the default, unsecure, inappropriate place, for many of these individuals to be 'held' after being charged with an offense.

I appreciate everyone's efforts, collaborating, on this important legislation that will have such an impact to us personally, the safety of our colleagues, safety of our communities, and for equal justice for the victims.

I invite any follow up questions to support further understanding of the current process and noted gaps from the direct care standpoint in these situations in Healthcare settings and encourage further collaboration with direct care healthcare leaders in our specialty organizations to support successful implementation of a forensic facility to support the systems involved, the patients that need continued care, the victims, and the state's resource utilization for sustainability, responsibly, and equally.

Respectfully,

Liz Couto, BSN, RN, CEN, Director at Large, Government Affairs Committee Chair, Vermont - ENA