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Governor Kim Reynolds

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I am Detective Don Vestal with the Urbandale Police Department. I joined the department in 1988 and I have served the department as a full-time officer since 1993. Serving in various capacities over the years, I was assigned to the Criminal Investigation Division in 2012.

My primary duties are investigations involving victims of children sexual and physical abuse, adult domestic violence, and adult sexual abuse. There has been no greater service and commitment as I have experienced than working with so many amazing victims and their families

I have learned the difficulty and further trauma victims have experienced as part of their disclosure to medical staff, police, and legal members.

Being a victim of these types of crimes in and by itself is traumatic in many ways. From the actual assault, reporting, medical examinations, waiting weeks and months for the completion of the investigation, and then the long prosecution process.

After all of the struggles of deciding to report, the victim's first experience is a visit to a local emergency room. There they are met with medical staff that is not trained in the procedures of a proper, sexual forensic examination. The ER staff contacts a specialized team of nurses and advocacy for the victims.

This specialized staff is not part of the ER staff and responds to the request. Victims have to wait in a ER room until the proper staff arrives to complete the examination. Once the examination is complete, victims are expected to provide a statement from the same table and in the same room where they were just examined. Often times, officers respond to the ER and most are not educated and experienced in providing a proper Trauma Informed Interview with the victim.

Once released from the ER victims are again called upon by law enforcement for additional interviews. These interviews are generally done in the same interview rooms that are used for the interrogations of offenders or are completed in a general conference room. These are not proper locations for speaking with victims experiencing such trauma.

A complete team of medical professionals, advocates, law enforcement, DHS, and prosecuting staff are needed for a successful investigation and victim care. Involving each of these teams requires the victim additional stress having to coordinate the needs of each service with each being located at a different place and being completed on various dates.

I am in hopes of there being a future center of some type to improve the experience of each victim, their families and reduce their trauma. The most important aspect of a proper investigation is the care for a victim and building their trust.

I have always tried to improve the services for each victim in any way I have been able. I have often expressed the need of the proper space for trauma victims in our department. I made it known that interviews in an ER setting are poor practices often times resulting in partial or what may appear to be inconsistent statements.

Requiring the victim to seek the specialized attention they need through so many different spaces is overwhelming to them. I see the need for a centralized facility to provide all of the needed services for each victim and their family.

I have used the term adult because there is already such a service in place for children known as the Blank Children's STAR Center (Support Team for Achieving Resiliency). Similar practices and services provided by the STAR Center would be a much-needed improvement in the adult trauma services.

Adult victims are often less resilient than children, but we expect and require more from them, and it is difficult for victims to coordinate their care through various disciplines required in each investigation.

I imagine a trauma center for adult victims to include medical care, mental care, safe spaces for communication, and continual care, support and education for each victim experiencing the trauma of the long difficult process of proper investigations and prosecution.

Thank you for the opportunity of sharing my thoughts. I appreciate you understanding the continual need for improving services to all victims.

Respectfully submitted,