

# **SART Biennial Report 2021-2023**

## **8th Judicial District Hopkins, Franklin, and Delta Counties**

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## **Executive Summary**

The 8th Judicial District Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is committed to providing comprehensive support to victims of sexual assault, enhancing interagency coordination, and promoting community awareness and prevention efforts. Over the past two years, the SART has diligently pursued these objectives through a range of activities aimed at supporting victims, improving investigative procedures, and fostering community education.

The primary objectives of the SART include ensuring compassionate care and advocacy for survivors of sexual assault, facilitating effective communication and coordination among law enforcement, healthcare providers, and victim advocacy organizations, and raising awareness about sexual assault prevention and available resources in the community. The SART aims to create a supportive environment for victims, promoting their healing and recovery, while also striving to secure justice for survivors through the legal system. By enhancing interagency collaboration, the team works to streamline processes and ensure a comprehensive response to sexual assault cases. Additionally, through community engagement initiatives, the SART seeks to educate the public, reduce stigma, and foster a culture of prevention and support.

The main goals and activities of the SART include victim advocacy, forensic examinations, multidisciplinary case reviews, and community outreach. The SART strives to provide immediate and ongoing support to victims through trained advocates who accompany them during medical exams and legal proceedings. The SART will help ensure timely and thorough forensic evidence collection to support criminal investigations and prosecutions through Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner exams. Members of the SART then conduct regular meetings with law enforcement, prosecutors, medical professionals, and victim advocates to review cases and ensure a coordinated response. Finally, the SART aims to connect with

members of the community through public awareness campaigns, training sessions, and outreach projects to reduce stigma surrounding sexual assault.

The SART has gathered valuable insights into the challenges and successes of its operations. Key challenges have included resource constraints, difficulties in interagency communication, societal stigma associated with sexual assault, and a significant issue with the lack of survivors reporting their assaults to law enforcement. Despite these challenges, the team strives to achieve enhancement in victim empowerment, improving service delivery efficiency, and increasing community participation in prevention efforts.

Key accomplishments of the SART include increased accessibility and quality of victim support services, improved coordination and communication among participating agencies, and enhanced community awareness and proactive engagement in preventing sexual violence. The SART also undertook a community outreach project involving a town mural to foster a supportive environment and promote awareness.

In conclusion, the 8th Judicial District Sexual Assault Response Team remains dedicated to its mission of supporting survivors, improving collaboration among stakeholders, and fostering a safer community. By addressing current challenges, including the critical issue of underreporting, and building on past achievements, the SART is poised to continue making meaningful strides in the fight against sexual violence.

## **SART Overview**

### **I. Sexual Assault Response Team Members:**

Mary Ferguson - SAFE-T

Jodi Cox - 8th Judicial Assistant District Attorney

Lewis Tatum - Hopkins County Sheriff

Jason Ricketson - Sulphur Springs Police Chief

Kim Basinger - Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner

Donna Pendleton - Lakes Regional Behavioral Health

Jennifer Bogdanski - Lakes Regional Behavioral Health

Charla Singleton - Delta County Sheriff

Lauren Fleming - Northeast Texas Child Advocacy Center

Amy Dykes - SAFE-T

Cassidy Cameron - Christus Mother Frances Hospital, Sulphur Springs

## **II. 8th Judicial District Regional SART Resolution**

WHEREAS Hopkins County recognizes that work must be done at a societal and local level to reduce the incidence of sexual assault, hold offenders accountable and to help heal victims: now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED by the Commissioners Court of Hopkins County

That Hopkins County will join with Franklin and Delta Counties to establish the 8th Judicial District Regional Adult Sexual Assault Response Team, effective December \_\_, 2021.

Hopkins County will appoint individuals to serve on the Regional Sexual Assault Response Team.

- Mary Ferguson or her designee;
- Will Ramsay or his designee;
- Lewis Tatum, or his designee;
- Jason Ricketson or his designee;
- Kim Basinger; and
- Donna Pendleton; and
- Other persons the presiding officer of the response team considers necessary for the operation of the response team or as recommended by the response team.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

That in order to create systems that reduce re-traumatization and prioritize victim safety, members of the Regional SART appointed by Hopkins County are directed to work with other team members to:

- Elect a presiding officer and any other organizational and decision-making structures deemed for the success of the team;

- Recommend additional members to the team as necessary to fulfill the functions of the team;
- Attend scheduled meetings of the team or provide a designee as permitted by statute;
- Create a written interagency protocol that establishes local and regional processes for investigating and prosecuting sexual assaults, identifying and obtaining medical & forensic care, mental health care and advocacy resources for victims as required by Texas Local Government Code 351.256, no later than December 1, 2022;
- In developing a protocol, the response team shall consider Chapter 56A, Code of Criminal Procedure; may provide different procedures for use within a particular municipality or area of the county served by the response team; and shall prioritize the health and safety of survivors, including those who choose not to make a police report;
- Notify the Court of any statutory vacancies on the team that would require a new appointment within \_ days of those occurring;
- Collect and maintain data on the number of sexual assaults reported to local law enforcement agencies and the investigation, prosecution and disposition of such offenses as required by Texas Local Government Code 351,257(A) that will culminate in a written summary to the Commissioners Court by December 1st of every odd numbered year;
- Develop processes for information sharing and conflict resolution between team members;
- Distribute the written protocol to all responding law enforcement and service providers throughout Hopkins County & the 8th Judicial District Region;
- Participate in a minimum of 4 hours of annual cross training with other team members;

### **Mural Project and Cross-Training**

In a significant step towards fostering community awareness and support for survivors of sexual assault, our team embarked on a mural project, sponsored by Sherwin-Williams and Lowe's. The mural, painted by the local artist Jacoby Smith, serves as a visual representation of our commitment to de-stigmatizing sexual assault and highlighting the importance of a united community in supporting survivors.

The idea for the mural was born out of a collective desire to create a lasting, impactful message through art. We recognized that a powerful visual could serve as a catalyst for conversation and change, breaking down barriers of silence and stigma associated with sexual assault. The generous sponsorship from Sherwin-Williams and Lowe's provided us with the resources needed to bring this vision to life.

In conjunction with the mural project, our team members underwent mandatory cross-training to enhance our skills and understanding of various aspects of sexual assault response and survivor support. This comprehensive training took place during our quarterly meetings, where we invited speakers to present to the team on critical topics such as trauma-informed care, legal advocacy, and community outreach. The trauma-informed care training focused on understanding the impacts of trauma on survivors and how to provide empathetic and effective support. Legal advocacy training covered the legal processes and rights of survivors to ensure informed and empowered advocacy. The community outreach sessions provided strategies for engaging the community, raising awareness, and building strong support networks. These quarterly training sessions were essential in ensuring that every team member is equipped to provide the highest level of care and support to survivors.



The completed mural now stands as a beacon of hope and resilience in our community. It is a testament to our collective resolve to support survivors and end the stigma associated with sexual assault. The vibrant colors and powerful imagery of the mural invite ongoing conversation and reflection, making it a focal point for awareness and education.

This project, alongside our cross-training efforts, underscores our dedication to innovative and impactful community initiatives. The partnership with Sherwin-Williams, Lowe's, and Jacoby Smith demonstrates the power of collaboration in driving social change. As we move forward, we remain committed to protecting, supporting, and uplifting survivors of sexual assault through continued education, advocacy, and community engagement.

### **Data and Findings for Years 2021-2022**

It can be difficult to retrieve data from various outside agencies. The following are the best estimates according to the information provided.

Number of adult sexual assault reports received by local law enforcement agencies:

Delta Co.	1
Franklin Co.	4
Hopkins Co.	<u>6</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>

Number of investigations conducted as a result of those reports

Delta Co.	1
Franklin Co.	4
Hopkins Co.	<u>6</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>

Number of indictments presented in connection with a report and the disposition:

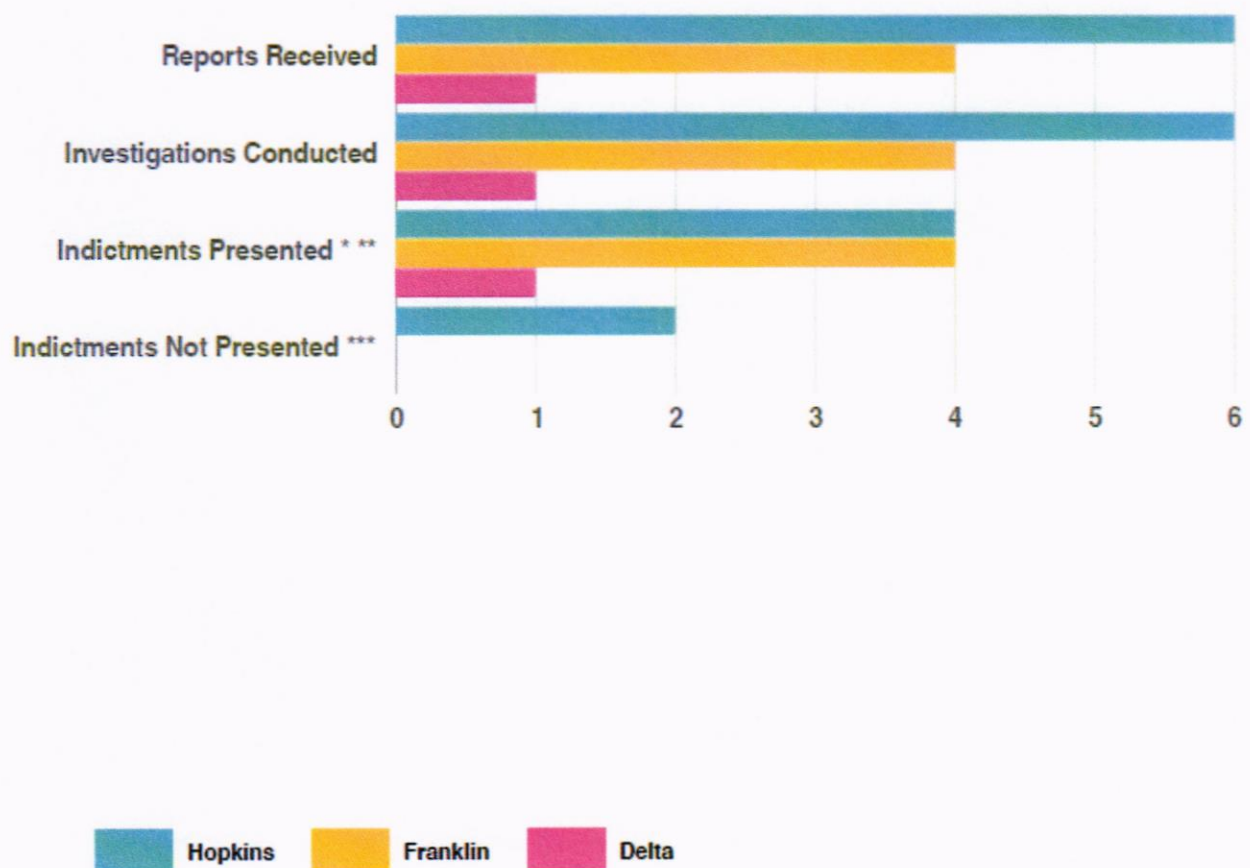
Delta Co.	1 - dismissed
Franklin Co.	4 - 3 cases pending, 1 case rejected by grand jury
Hopkins Co.	<u>4</u> - 3 cases no billed, 1 case rejected
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>

Number of reports of sexual assault for which no indictment was presented

Delta Co.	0
Franklin Co.	0
Hopkins Co.	<u>2</u> - 1 case affidavit of non-prosecution signed
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2</b>

## SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE TEAM DATA AND FINDINGS

2021-2022



\*Of the 4 Hopkins County cases where indictments were presented, 3 cases were no billed and 1 case was rejected by the Grand Jury

\*\*Of the 4 Franklin County cases where indictments were presented, 3 cases are pending and 1 case was rejected by the Grand Jury

\*\*\*Of the 2 Hopkins County cases where indictments were not presented, 1 case had an Affidavit of Non-Prosecution signed

## **SART Protocols of the 8th Judicial District**

### **I. Sexual Assault Response Team Overview**

The Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) model is widely recognized as the most effective approach for responding to sexual violence. The 8th Judicial District SART Protocol is a guide for an effective response to sexual assault in the 8th Judicial District.

A SART is a collaborative, multidisciplinary team that provides a coordinated, immediate, survivor-centered response to sexual assault. Typical SART members include law enforcement, sexual assault advocates, prosecutors, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE), Mental Health and IDD advocates, and Child Advocacy Centers.

The SART Model is particularly useful in settings where survivors face multiple barriers to reporting sexual assault and to getting help. On their own, not one of the partner agencies can provide a comprehensive response to incidents of sexual assault. Effective multidisciplinary teams result in better care for survivors and the specialized approach required for handling sexual assault investigations. When survivors, who are the key witnesses in any sexual assault case, are supported and their medical, emotional, and safety needs are addressed, they are better able to participate in the criminal justice process and, ultimately, to heal.

### **II. Goal of the SART**

The goal of the SART model is to address the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of a survivor of sexual abuse while increasing the likelihood of successful prosecution. The SART will do this by providing a comprehensive, coordinated, compassionate response to survivors of sexual assault.

### **III. Leadership Role of the 8th Judicial District SART**

The 8th Judicial District SART is charged with taking the lead in promoting sexual assault prevention and support of the victims of sexual assault. To this end, team members are specially trained staff members who work to prevent and respond to sexual abuse against victims in the 8th Judicial District.

Key leadership functions of the team members include:

- Effective communication within the teams, with other witnesses and professions, and with the community;
- Providing an environment that supports survivors by minimizing secondary trauma and facilitating necessary post-assault care;

- Streamlining the investigation process, leading to better outcomes; and
- Monitoring and ensuring department and facility compliance with SART policies related to sexual assault.

#### **IV. 8th Judicial SART Structure**

The foundation of the SART model's success is its multidisciplinary design. In keeping with this model, SART members are drawn from different departments, representing complementary areas of expertise.

The SART should convene a minimum of four times per year to monitor compliance with community partners and law enforcement agencies and SART policies related to sexual abuse; discuss successes, challenges, and strategies for overcoming barriers; and review and revise policies, training materials, memoranda of understanding, scope of work agreements, and contracts related to sexual abuse prevention and response.

SART members will be appointed by the Hopkins County Commissioners.

Additional members-at-large of the 8th Judicial SART may include:

- Medical staff
- Counselors or educators
- Victim Assistance Coordinators

#### **Role of SART Members**

##### **Law Enforcement Agencies**

- Ensure the quality and integrity of sexual assault investigations.
- Investigate and document all allegations of sexual assault.
- Collect and transport evidence.
- Identify, arrest, and/or refer charges against the alleged perpetrator(s).
- Arrange for forensic examination of the alleged survivor and perpetrator, when necessary.
- Participate in court proceedings.

##### **Lakes Regional Behavioral Health**

- Provide crisis intervention and ongoing mental health treatment for the survivor.
- Complete suicide assessment and provide interventions, as needed.
- Collaborate with community service providers to ensure ongoing services for survivors.
- Conduct long-term treatment planning and provide ongoing mental health care.

**Christus Mother Frances Hospital Sulphur Springs**

- Provide acute medical care and treatment for injuries following an allegation of sexual abuse, as needed.
- Preserve medical, forensic evidence, as needed.
- Offer testing and prophylaxis for sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy, when appropriate.
- Provide long-term medical care and treatment, as needed.

**Prosecutor**

- Review the investigative report.
- Notify and interview witnesses.
- Secure necessary evidence for the prosecution.
- File charges when appropriate.
- Prepare the survivor for court and provide victim notification as delineated in Chapter 56, Article 56A.051 of the Code of Criminal Procedure 2021-2023.

**Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE)**

- Interview the survivor to collect health history and information about the alleged sexual assault.
- Complete the sexual assault forensic exam.
- Collect and preserve forensic evidence.
- Provide care and prophylaxis.
- Provide resources and referrals.
- Be available to testify as a witness in criminal prosecution.

**Safe-T Crisis Center**

- Provide support, information, and crisis intervention for survivors.
- Inform the survivor about the investigation and medical forensic examination.
- Educate the survivor about Rape Trauma Syndrome and healing from sexual assault.
- Offer resources and referrals.
- Provide follow-up counseling, as needed.

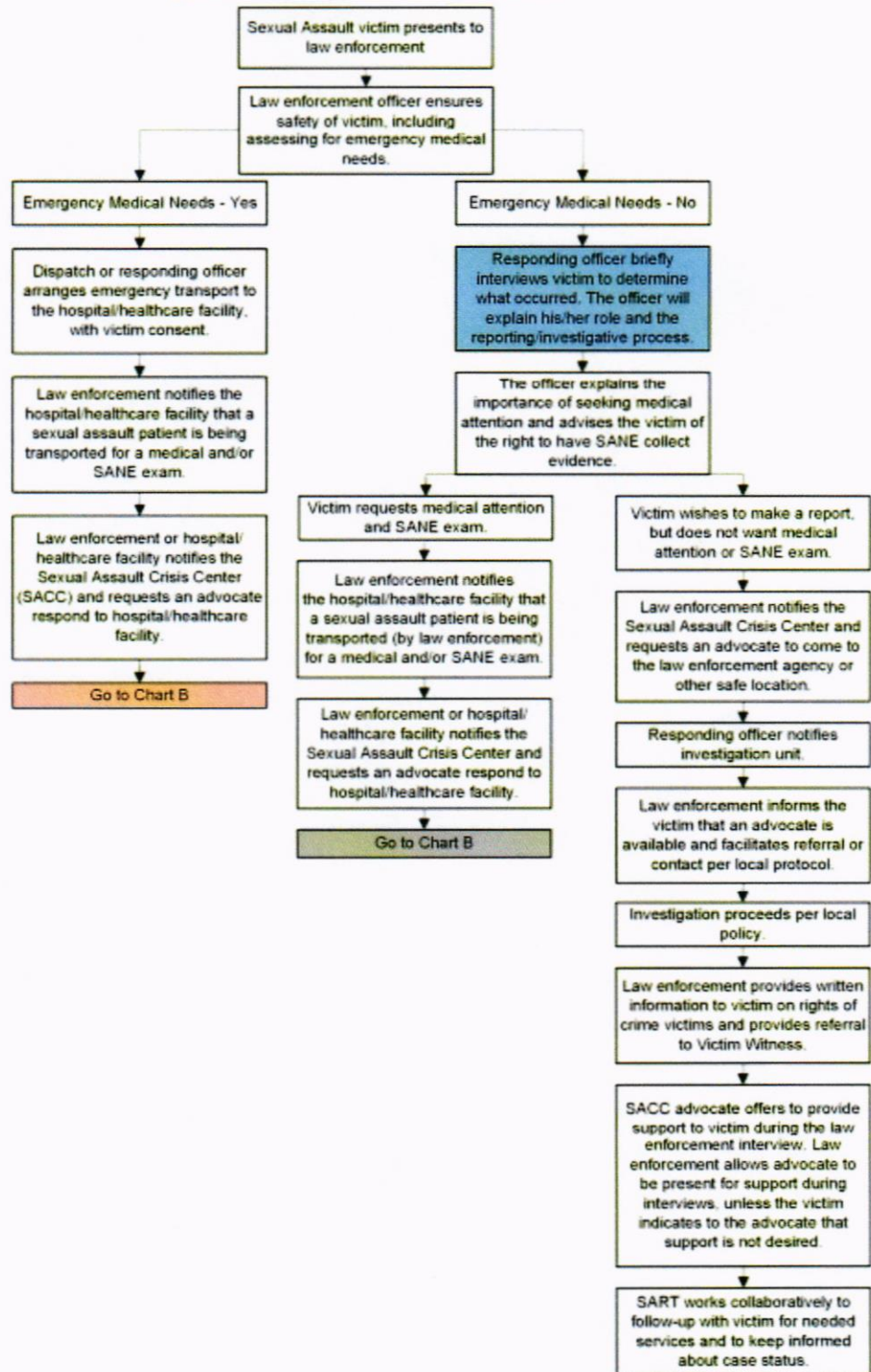
## **V. Initiating the SART Response**

The SART should be activated immediately in all cases of suspected or alleged nonconsensual sexual contact within the 8th Judicial District.

- SART Team Activation or Call-Out Process:
  - When any SART member or their agency learns of an incident or allegation of sexual abuse against a victim within the 8th Judicial District, the SART member or their agency will follow the procedures as outlined in the SART Activation or Call-Out Process as follows:

A

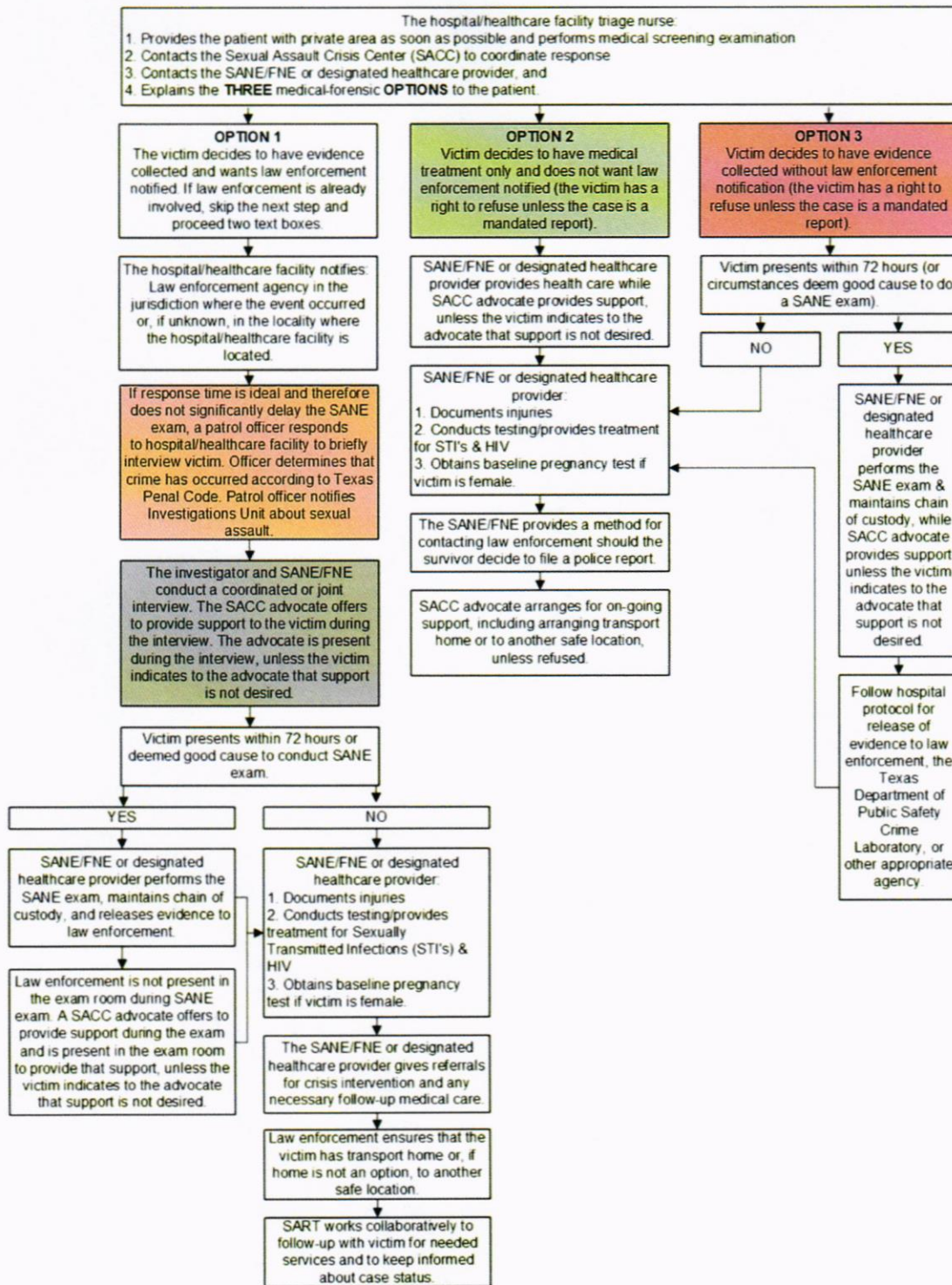
# **SART Team Activation or Call-Out Process: The Victim Calls Law Enforcement First**





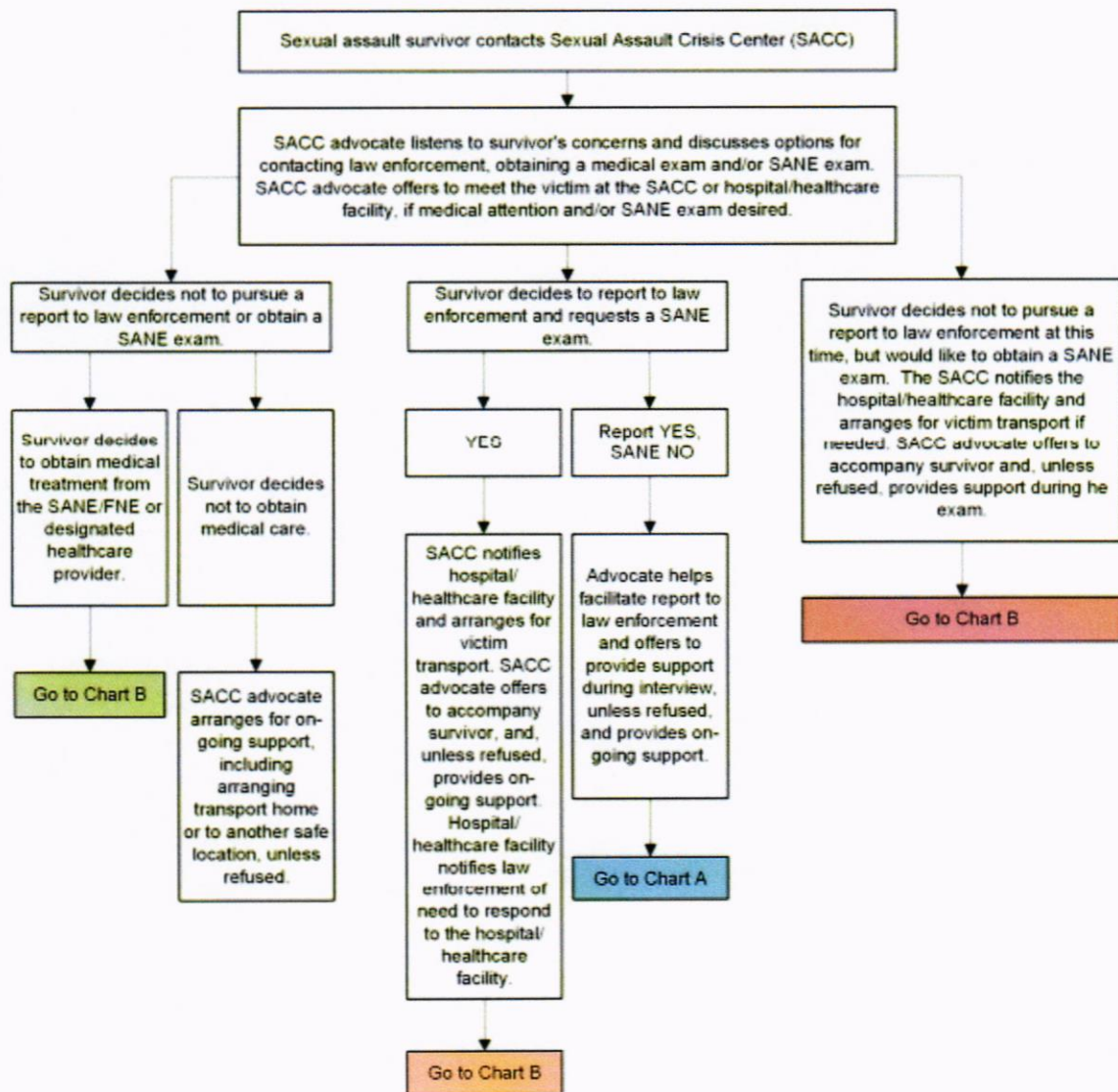
**B**

**SART Team Activation or Call-Out Process:  
Patient Presents at the Hospital/Healthcare Facility First**



C

### SART Team Activation or Call-Out Process: Survivor Contacts Sexual Assault Crisis Center First



**Evaluation of Protocols**

Due to a lack of sufficient data available, a case review evaluation of the SART protocols was not possible at this time.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the 8th Judicial District Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting survivors, enhancing interagency collaboration, and fostering a safer community across Hopkins, Franklin, and Delta Counties.

While we faced challenges such as difficulties in interagency communication and the significant issue of underreporting, our successes include increased accessibility and quality of support services, enhanced communication among team members, and proactive community engagement. Notably, our mural project and cross-training initiatives have fostered a more supportive environment for survivors and raised awareness about sexual violence.

Based on our experiences, we recommend strengthening interagency communication through structured protocols and regular training sessions. Additionally, enhancing our training programs to include comprehensive education on trauma-informed care, cultural sensitivity, and the latest forensic techniques will further improve our response capabilities.

Looking ahead, our goals for the next reporting period include addressing the critical issue of underreporting, building on past achievements, and continuing to improve our protocols.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all SART members and partners for their dedication and hard work. Your efforts have been instrumental in our progress and success. Together, we remain committed to supporting survivors of sexual assault, promoting justice, and creating a safer community for all.



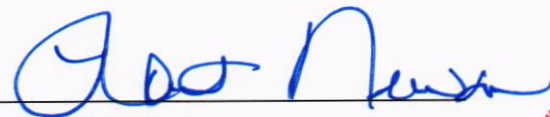
- Evaluate the interagency protocol through the utilization of case reviews, with the signed, written consent of the victim as required by Texas Local Government Code 351.258(f); and
- Participate in writing the biennial report to the Commissioners Court as required by Texas Local Government Code 351.257.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

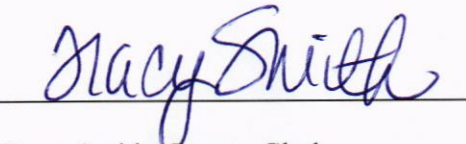
That Hopkins County will fill any statutory vacancies as requested by the 8th Judicial District Regional SART within 30 days of those vacancies occurring;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED

The written biennial report produced by the team shall be posted in a prominent place on the County's website and by law will be available to the public. The report shall not be redacted prior to its publication except for redactions needed to comply with the law to maintain privacy of individuals otherwise identified in the report.



Robert Newson, County Judge



Tracy Smith, County Clerk

