



SUPPORT TIMELY STREAMLINED HANDLING AND PROCESSING OF SEXUAL ASSAULT RAPE KITS

SUPPORT HB 1068 AND SB 5225

A sexual assault forensic medical examination is a specific medical procedure that includes detailed collection of evidence from a sexual assault victim. It is a highly invasive and comprehensive process which takes approximately 4-6 hours to complete.

In Washington State, what happens to rape kits (the body of evidence collected at the exam) after the examination varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. As part of the chain of custody, law enforcement takes possession of the kit when the victim has consented to release it for processing. Washington State lacks a streamlined process or expectation of law enforcement to forward this critical evidence to the crime lab for analysis. The lack of uniform process results in rape kits remaining on shelves in police storage. Victims who went through a significant trauma and an extensive medical collection procedure may not have access to justice. In addition, by not testing sexual assault kits, we are further jeopardizing public safety by not pursuing the identification and prosecution of offenders.

Washington State has not conducted a formal audit to determine the actual number of untested rape kits statewide, but the State estimates having thousands in storage. A review of kits submitted to the Seattle Police Department from the last decade found that only 22% of kits (365 out of 1641) were forwarded to the state crime lab for testing.*

HB 1068 and SB 5225 set forth a process mandating that rape kits be forwarded from law enforcement to the crime lab within 30 days. This important mandate will help streamline the process for forwarding kits to the crime lab for testing. The bill does not stipulate the timeframe in which the kits must be tested, but is an extremely positive step in much needed rape kit reform in Washington.

Victim advocates, law enforcement, prosecutors, legislators, and other service professionals acknowledge that more needs to be done to comprehensively address the handling of rape kits statewide to better meet the needs of victims and communities. To that end, the bill creates a multi-disciplinary state workgroup charged with the review and analysis of the current system and putting forward reform recommendations to the legislature.

Solution

- Support sexual assault victim access to justice, offender accountability, and community safety
- Support HB 1068 and SB 5225, which requires forwarding of rape kits to law enforcement within 30 days

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