

From: Tracey Waters LMSW

Sent: 7/27/2015 8:16:15 PM

To: Haley, Nikki

Cc:

Subject: I urge you to make tracking and testing of sexual assault evidence kits a priority in our state.

Dear Nikki Haley (R),

I am writing you today to ask that you make eliminating the untested rape kit backlog a priority in our state.

Following a sexual assault, the survivor may be asked to have a medical forensic examination performed. A doctor or nurse will photograph, swab and conduct an examination of the survivor's entire body for DNA evidence left behind by the attacker – a process that may take four to six hours to complete. The evidence is then collected in a Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit – a “rape kit.” When tested, rape kit evidence can identify an unknown assailant, confirm the presence of a known suspect, affirm the survivor's account of the attack, connect the suspect to other unsolved crimes and exonerate innocent suspects and the wrongly convicted.

And yet, far too often, a decision is made not to process the evidence. Even when law enforcement does send a kit to a crime lab for testing, it can sit for months, and in some cases years, before being tested. Each untested kit represents a missed opportunity for justice and healing for a survivor and leaves violent offenders on the streets of our communities.

Only a handful of states know the true extent of their rape kit backlogs. Those states have required law enforcement agencies to audit, or count, the previously untested kits in their custody. A few states, such as Colorado, Illinois, and Texas require testing of all previously-untested kits and newly-collected kits.

I urge you to join the growing list of states that are addressing rape kit backlogs. Please pass comprehensive legislation that will address our state's lack of accountability regarding the rape kits languishing in police and crime lab storage facilities. Such legislation would ensure the counting, tracking and timely testing of every kit booked into evidence and connected with a reported rape. Our law enforcement agencies must commit to investigating rape cases thoroughly and moving more cases forward to prosecution. This critical investment will save lives, prevent suffering and make our communities safer.

Sincerely,

Tracey Waters LMSW

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