

State of Reform: Alaska

Overview of Reform

Known Backlog: 3,800 untested kits statewide.

Inventory: One-time inventory, not annual.

Testing Previously Unsubmitted Kits: Not mandated.

Testing Newly Collected Kits: Not mandated.

Victims' Rights to Notice: Not mandated.

Rape Kit Tracking System: None.

Funding for testing: None appropriated at the state level. Alaska State Troopers received a \$1,090,450 Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grant in 2016.

Background

In 2015, Governor Bill Walker initiated an inventory tasking all state of Alaska departments and law enforcement agencies handling sexual assault kits to determine the number of untested kits. The Alaska State Troopers complied, yet fewer than 20 of the state's 53 police departments complied. The audit revealed 3,800 backlogged kits statewide, with about one-third of Alaska's backlog in the possession of the Alaska State Troopers.

In September 2016, a newspaper from the University of Alaska at Anchorage published an article indicating that Anchorage Police Department had conducted an audit and found 1,691 untested kits in storage. Through communications with APD, Joyful Heart confirmed this number, and learned that these kits date as far back as 1993.

Legislative Reform

In January 2017, State Representative Geran Tarr (D-19) introduced legislation on rape kit reform, H.B. 31. This bill passed the House of Representatives in April 2017 and is in the Senate State Affairs Committee. A one-time inventory in S.B. 55 was signed into law in May 2017.

Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Grant

In 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance awarded the Alaska Department of Public Safety (DPS) a \$1,090,450 Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grant to process over 1,000 untested kits in the possession of the Alaska State Troopers. As of September 2017, DPS is creating a plan to triage kits for testing as well as a victim notification protocol.

Going Forward

To eliminate the backlog of untested rape kits, Alaska should enact an annual audit, require the submission and testing of backlogged and newly collected kits, establish victims' rights to notice, appropriate funding to enhance law enforcement and crime lab capacity, and establish a rape kit tracking system. Joyful Heart is ready to assist local stakeholders and legislators to customize legislation addressing Alaska's unique challenges and existing statute.