

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE GERAN TARR

HB117

"An Act requiring a report on untested sexual assault examination kits; and providing for an effective date."

Victims of sexual assault deserve justice, and it is the state's responsibility to ensure that appropriate actions take place following an assault, such as gathering the evidence necessary to apprehend perpetrators and allow the healing process for the victim to begin. A part of these actions involves processing rape kits to identify suspects and remove these perpetrators from our streets. Our state, however, does not know how many untested rape kits are currently in its possession, which HB117 aims to answer by way of an audit.

Information provided by Orin Dym, the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory's forensic manager, stated that it is currently "not known" how many rape kits go untested in Alaska each year; it is "not known" how many completed sexual assault evidence collection kits have been utilized by a law enforcement agency, but not yet submitted to the crime lab for testing; and it is "not known" how Alaska's rate of untested rape kits compares, for better or worse, to other states.

What we do know is that Alaska's rape rate is three times the national average, with Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) findings reporting that rapes are more common in Alaska than in any other state. In 2013, the FBI listed 922 rape cases in Alaska, which means that for every 100,000 residents, there are 125.4 rape cases.

Although Alaska does not formally track untested rape kits, a 2009 CBS report on the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory said there were a total of 565 untested kits in the lab dating back to 2006. Of those, 173 had known suspects, 266 were from 2009 and were waiting to be tested, 123 dated back to 2006 and were waiting to be screened for DNA or testing, and 176 had been through preliminary screening and awaiting DNA analysis. These numbers are in reference to the state's crime detection laboratory, but what numbers could appear once *local* law enforcement agencies start reporting their untested rape kits?

Additionally, with the information provided by an audit, the state of Alaska could be eligible for federal funds through the Department of Justice that are specifically allocated to help process any untested kits.

HB117 will provide the Alaska legislature with real numbers from an audit to assess whether or not the state has a backlog of untested rape kits. Untested rape kits need to be processed so perpetrators cannot go on to commit more crimes at the expense of our children, women, and men.