

Federal Responses

"Using the DNA evidence collected in a rape kit, a police department can conclusively identify an assailant—even when the survivor cannot visually identify her attacker.

When DNA collected in rape kits matches existing DNA records, police can quickly capture habitual rapists before they strike again. Rape kit DNA evidence is survivors' best bet for justice. It is also communities' best bet for public safety."

- U.S. Senator Al Franken

The federal government does not require state and local law enforcement agencies to report on the number of untested rape kits in their facilities. As a result, there is no comprehensive, national data on the nature and scope of the rape kit backlog.

Despite this lack of a reporting requirement, federal lawmakers have put forth several promising reforms, and various federal laws have helped to encourage rape kit testing at the state and local levels.

New Federal Funding for Rape Kit Reform

President Obama's FY2015 budget proposal included dedicated funding for a grant program that will provide communities across the country with the vital resources they need—and are asking for—to develop and implement comprehensive, multi-disciplinary rape kit reform. In December 2014, Congress approved a federal spending bill including an allocation of \$41 million to address the national rape kit backlog.

In February 2015, President Obama released his FY2016 budget, which included \$41 million in funding for the Justice Department's community-based sexual assault response initiative. This funding will build on the efforts of the Department of Justice's grant program, and will allow even more jurisdictions to address their rape kit backlogs, apprehend perpetrators, and bring justice to survivors. The President's budget also includes \$20 million for research on reducing the backlog of sexual assault kits at Justice's National Institute of Justice.

Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Reduction Grants

In 2004, Congress passed the Debbie Smith Act, which provides grants to eligible states and local governments for several purposes, including training and education programs for law enforcement, correctional personnel and court officers, training and education programs for sexual assault forensic examiners, testing backlogged DNA evidence—including rape kits—and increasing the capacity of state and local crime labs to conduct DNA testing. The Act also provides funding for jurisdictions that outsource DNA evidence to private crime labs for testing.

The Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Registry Act

The Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Registry (SAFER) Act, passed by Congress as part of the 2013 reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, re-focuses the Debbie Smith grant program on ending the backlog. State and local grantees must now use a greater percentage of Debbie Smith funds—up to 75% from 40%—directly on analyzing untested DNA evidence, or enhancing the capacity of labs to do so. Previously, the greater portion of funds went to initiatives like training, education programs and equipment for law enforcement.

The SAFER Act also provides state and local governments with funding to conduct one-year audits of the untested rape kits in their possession and upload data on every individual kit into a national web-based registry. This process is slated to begin at the end of 2013. While this funding program is voluntary, we believe the registry has the potential to improve what we know about the rape kit backlog and enhance our collective efforts to end it.

National Institute of Justice Research Grants

The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), the research arm of the Department of Justice, has provided millions of dollars in direct grants to accredited public crime labs through its DNA Backlog Reduction Program.

Eligible states and local governments may request funds from NIJ to increase the capacity of their existing crime labs to analyze DNA samples more efficiently. Eligible applicants may also request funds to handle, screen and analyze backlogged DNA evidence. For more information, click [here](#).

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Federal

\$41 Million Funding Fact

Sheetter To Congress

State

Colorado

Illinois

Ohio

Texas

Local

Detroit

Houston

Los Angeles

Memphis

New York City

San Francisco

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING

VICTIM NOTIFICATION

JOYFUL HEART'S EFFORTS

OUR PARTNERS' EFFORTS

YOUR RESPONSE

What Can I Do?

Backlog News

Joyful Heart Applauds President's Investment in Rape Kit Reform

News, February 2, 2015

Detroit Launches Fundraising Initiative to Address Rape Kit Backlog

News, January 13, 2015

Manhattan District Attorney Seeks Input from Jurisdictions with Rape Kit Backlog

News, December 19, 2014

Statement of Manhattan DA Cyrus R. Vance, Jr. On Congressional Funding To Help Eliminate Rape Kit Backlogs

In 2011, NIJ also awarded action-research grants to Wayne County, Michigan, which includes Detroit, and Houston, Texas to convene multidisciplinary teams to study the causes of the backlog and develop and implement a plan for testing. There were more than 11,000 untested rape kits in Detroit and approximately 6,600 in Houston.

Learn more about local efforts, including those taking place in **Detroit**, **Memphis** and **Houston**, as well as **state-level reforms**.

In Cities Nationwide

News, December 10, 2014

Sexual Assault Survivors Given Hope
in Congressional Spending Bill

News, December 9, 2014