

March 4, 2015

**Letter in support of HB 117**

The Rape Kit Action Project (RKAP) stands in strong support of HB 117, legislation aimed at identifying and counting untested rape kits in Alaska. This legislation is a vitally important starting point in determining whether Alaska, like most other states, has a “hidden backlog” of rape evidence that was carefully collected by trained medical professionals, but then never sent forward to the forensic lab for analysis. We urge the Alaska Legislature to enact this important public safety measure.

The Rape Kit Action Project is a collaboration between the National Center for Victims of Crime, Natasha’s Justice Project, and the Rape Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN). Our Advocacy Partners include sexual assault survivors and parents of rape and homicide victims. RKAP’s primary mission is to promote policies for timely submission and analysis of untested sexual assault evidence kits to achieve justice.

Communities across the country are struggling with the discovery of thousands of untested rape kits in law enforcement storage. In some of these jurisdictions where analysis on this long-neglected evidence has begun, numerous rapes and murders have been solved, bringing answers to victims and taking dangerous criminals off the streets.

**Passing HB 117 will add Alaska to the growing list of states that believe—as we do— that our nation can do better at protecting our communities and ensuring justice for victims.** Counting untested sexual assault kits is critical for a community that takes public safety and victims’ rights seriously.

Rape Kit Action Project Steering Committee:

National Center for Victims of Crime

Natasha’s Justice Project

Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network

## MESSAGE FROM RAPE KIT ACTION PROJECT ADVOCACY PARTNERS

The *RKAP Advocacy Partners* are the reason behind the Rape Kit Advocacy Project: survivors of sexual assault and their family members. With this unique perspective, we provide RKAP – and through them, state lawmakers – with input and support. We hope you will consider introducing legislation in 2015, and we are poised to support your efforts. Below is some additional information. Even more can be found on the RKAP website: [everykitcounts.org](http://everykitcounts.org). Please act today and contact RKAP for assistance. Support has never been greater for this critical work.

Carol Bart, TX  
Michelle Bowdler, MA  
Susan Cash, GA

Yvonne Pointer, OH  
Amy Roberts, OH  
Joanie Scheske, MO

Jayann Sepich, NM  
Debbie Smith, VA  
Julie Weil, FL

## AT LEAST 100,000 FACES, ONE BIG PROBLEM.

Based on only a handful of public reports, we know that more than 100,000 sexual assault forensic evidence kits (“rape kits”) sit untested and unaccounted for. Each of these kits represents a victim seeking justice and a potential serial criminal who may be wandering the streets. This is inexcusable and we must do better. Here’s a sampling of what we *do* know has been discovered to date:

**AZ:** 2,000 kits in Phoenix

**OK:** 3,700 kits in Tulsa

**NV:** 4,000 kits Clark County

**CA:** 2,000 kits in Alameda County

**OH:** 4,000 kits in Cleveland

**TX:** 20,000 kits statewide

**IL:** 4,000 kits statewide

**MI:** 11,000 kits in Detroit

## WHAT ARE STATES DOING?

In 2014, **Louisiana, Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Virginia**, with RKAP’s expert advice and support, enacted laws requiring law enforcement to audit evidence rooms for untested kits and report the figures to the legislature. Sample legislation is attached.

States like **California, Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, Texas, and Utah** have gone a step further and passed laws addressing issues of ongoing tracking and reporting of rape kit evidence, and established statewide standards for the timely submission of sexual assault evidence kits.

## THE IMPACT.

States and local jurisdictions that have moved decisively to identify and test all rape kits in their jurisdictions are finding remarkable success:

**CO:** 24 rape suspects identified from testing 150 previously un-submitted rape kits.

**OH:** 1,600 rape suspects identified from testing 4,000 kits.

**MI (Detroit):** 100 rape suspects identified from testing of first 1,600 kits.

**CA (Alameda County):** 27 rape suspects identified from the first 52 rape kits processed.

## FEDERAL GRANT FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR STATES’ EFFORTS.

- The FY 2015 federal budget includes \$41 million to support community responses to rape kit backlogs. The U.S. Department of Justice has announced grants will be available to support a variety of functions, including audits of backlogs, and rape kit testing.
- **The Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Elimination Act** was renewed by Congress in 2014, and supports crime laboratory analysis of forensic DNA cases, including rape kits.
- The **Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Reporting (SAFER) grant** (part of the federal Debbie Smith grant program) will provide resources to local law enforcement for the purpose of auditing un-submitted rape kits.
- In the fall of 2014, Manhattan’s District Attorney announced a grant fund of \$35 million to assist jurisdictions **nationwide** with the costs associated with rape kit testing. The solicitation for this grant is expected later in 2015.

For information on these and other funding opportunities and related solutions, please visit our site or contact RKAP at [everykitcounts@gmail.com](mailto:everykitcounts@gmail.com).