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Alaska Senate Finance Committee
405 E Street, Suite 104
Juneau, AK 99801

Honorable Chair Hoffman, Chair Olson, Chair Stedman, and Members of the Committee,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports [House Bill 62](#), which would codify the statewide rape kit tracking system into law and grant sexual assault survivors the right to know the location and testing date of their kit. We urge the Finance Committee to move this important legislation out of committee. Survivors in Alaska, which has one of the highest rates of sexual assault in the country, should not have to wait another year for these crucial reforms.

There are around 1000 reported sexual assaults in Alaska every year. In the immediate aftermath of a sexual assault, a victim may choose to undergo a four-to-six-hour medical forensic examination to collect DNA evidence in a sexual assault examination kit (“rape kit”). Most survivors, after leaving the hospital, are never contacted about the status of their rape kit. Ensuring that survivors and all stakeholders in the criminal justice process can know the location and status of collected rape kits will bring transparency to rape kit processing and prevent a backlog from happening again.

In 2021, Governor Mike Dunleavy announced that the state would establish a rape kit tracking system with a victim portal. In July 2023, the Alaska Department of Public Safety’s Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System went live, enabling survivors of sexual assault to track the status of their kit securely online. However, the system is not mandated by law. Codifying the system and mandating participation prevents compliance discrepancies across the state and ensures stability when leadership or priorities shift from year to year.

HB62 also grants victims the right to know the status and location of their kit, whether by calling or walking into their local precinct. The current law in AS 44.41.065 vaguely requires law enforcement to make only a “reasonable effort” to notify victims that their kit has been tested, a phrase highly susceptible to misinterpretation. Moreover, providing offline access is vital for survivors who cannot safely use the online tracking system due to cohabitation with the offender or stalking. We strongly support this provision to ensure comprehensive, secure access for all survivors.

The bill also requires hospitals to notify law enforcement within 14 days of collecting a reported kit. This is the initial step in the chain of custody for rape kits. Illinois and Mississippi require a 4-hour notification timeline for hospitals, ten states require a 24-hour timeline, Arizona requires a 48-hour timeline, and Oregon requires a 7-day timeline based on a 2016 law. Alaska's 14-day mandate would be the longest timeline in the country. Tracking systems allow hospitals to quickly scan the barcodes of newly collected kits and send automated notifications to law enforcement for pick up. With the current technology, 14 days is far too long for hospitals to scan the new kits into the tracking system. See the attached chart of rape kit handling timelines for the full list of states. We recommend the legislature to consider shortening it.

With HB62, Alaska will achieve [comprehensive rape kit reform](#). The Joyful Heart Foundation thanks you for your efforts on this issue and urges you to pass this legislation out of committee quickly. We stand ready to assist you in creating safer communities and offering a path to healing and justice to all sexual assault survivors in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Burcu Sagiroglu, MPP
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