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February 23, 2024

Dear Representative Prax, House Health and Social Services Committee Chair:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit STAR's support of HB 275, a bill relating to sexual assault examination kits.

HB 275 will bring Alaska closer to meeting national best standards of practice for processing sexual assault examination kits. Since 2016, the State of Alaska worked diligently to eliminate a backlog of evidence kits throughout the state. With a goal of never having another backlog of that kind, transparency and accountability have come to the forefront.

HB 275 will require forensic healthcare providers to complete their portion of the sexual assault kit and notify law enforcement within 7 days of collection that the kit ready is for submission to the laboratory for analysis. Both law enforcement and the laboratory have timelines imposed by statute (AS 41.44.065). The bill does not seek to penalize healthcare providers, rather it codifies a standard of practice, assures accountability, and encourages systemic problem-solving when the expectation cannot be met.

A time limit of 7 days is reasonable, based on the 2017 U.S. Department of Justice's recommendation of 24 hours to notify law enforcement with a collection deadline of 3 days or less. (*National Best Practices: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, 35). STAR was notified that 14 states already mandate a limit of 24 hours for forensic healthcare providers to prepare evidence collection kits, while another 2 states set a deadline of 7 days. The proposed 7 day standard will be on par with other concerned states and beyond the federal recommendation.

STAR participated in 324 sexual assault examination responses in 2023. This was a 27% increase from 2022. Keeping the evidence collection kits simple yet thorough ensures forensic medical providers are able to meet a 7 day deadline. Alaska's evidence collection kits are designed to be completed at the time of collection with some additional notes made soon after. The kit paperwork is routinely reviewed by statewide stakeholders, including two forensic medical professionals, to keep the forms well suited for the task of evidence collection.

The statewide sexual assault examination kit tracking system, called Trak-Kit, provides survivors an online portal to track the location and status of their kit from initial submission to final testing. Track-Kit gives survivors a sense of control and participation in the investigative process, which can be crucial in their healing journey. Trak-Kit is also used by State and municipal agencies to monitor delays and progress of kits. Knowing that the kit will be sent to the laboratory without delay supports survivors' reclamation of control and supports the State's effort towards transparency.

Thank you for your time and attention to this proposed legislation. We believe it moves Alaska forward in the right direction for survivors of sexual assault.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Keeley Olson".

Keeley Olson
Executive Director