



JOYFUL
HEART
FOUNDATION

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March 30, 2022

Members of the House Judiciary Committee
JNUCAP120, State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801-1182

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Honorable Chair Claman and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports [House Bill 5](#), which will ensure the swift testing of rape kits. Sexual assault survivors in Alaska deserve healing and justice. We urge you to prioritize this bill and pass it out of committee.

Alaska has the highest sexual assault rate in the United States. In the immediate aftermath, a victim may choose to undergo a medical forensic examination—which can take four to six hours—to collect DNA evidence left behind by the attacker in what is commonly called a rape kit. When tested, this evidence can identify an unknown assailant, reveal serial offenders, and exonerate the wrongfully convicted. Among the 34 states with codified kit testing timelines, average lab testing mandate is 100 days, while seven states mandate 90 days for testing. The current one-year testing mandate in Alaska is the longest, leaving survivors waiting for justice.

A shorter timeline ensures that rape kits are handled swiftly, potentially preventing crime including [serial rapes](#). In December 2000, a woman waiting for her bus was raped by [Eric Eugene Wilkes in Detroit](#). Her rape kit was shelved. Four months later, another rape kit was shelved with the same assailant. The third kit was collected three days later. Like the first one, these two kits were left untested, leaving Wilkes free on the streets. After Wayne County started testing 11,341 backlogged rape kits in 2009, Wilkes' DNA was found in 11 violent rape cases, spanning between 2000 and 2012. Had the investigators sent the first kit to testing, Wilkes' DNA would be in local and national databases. The second kit would have matched in the database, leading to his identification earlier and preventing later rapes. **This case shows the importance of speedy testing and how it can prevent additional crimes.** With H.B. 5, Alaska is poised to join the long list of states that ensure swift rape kit processing timelines.

The Joyful Heart Foundation urges you to prioritize this crucial bill and move it out of committee. 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,

Ilse Knecht

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