



MIKE DEWINE

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House State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 719
Proponent Testimony
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Chair Anielski, Vice Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, my name is Karen Huey, and I am the Assistant Superintendent of the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI). On behalf of Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine, I am here to offer his full support of House Bill 719, legislation to create a sexual assault examination kit tracking system here in Ohio.

There has been tremendous focus and discussion nationally on the issue of untested sexual assault kits, often referred to as the “backlog” of rape kits across the country. Ohio and other states initiated widespread sexual assault reform efforts to identify funding, enhance forensic lab services, and pursue legislative action to mandate the cleanup of these backlogs and institute best practices for the collection and testing of kits moving forward.

In 2011, under the direction of Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine, BCI began collecting and testing all untested sexual assault kits. By 2018, nearly 14,000 sexual assault kits were collected and tested in our labs.

There have also been important legislative steps taken in Ohio. House Bill 6 from the 131st General Assembly increased the statute of limitations for sexual assault. Senate Bill 316 from the 130th General Assembly required all law enforcement to turn in untested kits within one year, and also mandated the timely submission of future kits.

House Bill 719 continues Ohio’s dedication to sexual assault reform by establishing a tracking system, which will follow a sexual assault examination kit throughout the criminal justice process.

At any time during the process, a sexual assault survivor will be able to access a secure, online portal to determine the location and status of their kit. The system will utilize barcode technology to track the evidence collected at the hospital as it moves to law enforcement and the crime laboratory. The victims of these heinous crimes will be able to access the status of their kits from the comfort of their homes, completely confidentially.

In anticipation of the passage of the bill before you today, the Attorney General’s Office has already convened the Sexual Assault Kit Tracking Advisory Board, made up of representatives from Ohio’s victim communities, hospitals, law enforcement, crime laboratories, and prosecutors. The Board approved the release of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the tracking system and is ready to help build out the requirements once a vendor is selected.

Funding for the tracking system will come through federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) dollars. We are not asking for any GRF funding for this system. However, we believe the bill is necessary to ensure all chains of custody are required to participate. Additionally, the Crime Victim Services Section of the Attorney General's Office will offer administrative support for the system, serving as a point of contact for the users of the system, including sexual assault survivors.

Ohio has made great progress on sexual assault reform, and the creation of a sexual assault kit tracking system will assure sexual assault survivors that the system will not fail them in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.