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House State and Local Government Committee
Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 719
Representatives Dorothy Pelanda
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Thank you Chair Anielski, Vice-Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee for the opportunity to provide Sponsor Testimony on House Bill 719.

HB 719 is legislation that requires the Attorney General’s office to create and maintain a statewide tracking system for the processing of sexual assault examination kits. The bill continues the significant progress that the Attorney General’s office has achieved in the testing of such kits. Through their Sexual Assault Kit Testing Initiative (or SAK), nearly 14,000 previously untested rape kits that had never been sent to a crime lab for DNA analysis have been tested.

This summer, Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine announced that his office was developing a statewide system to increase transparency surrounding the collection, submission, and analysis of sexual assault kit evidence in Ohio. SAK will give those who have undergone a sexual assault forensic examination the option to anonymously track the status of their rape kit evidence online.

By entering a barcode number into the free, online program, survivors who choose to use the system will be able to follow their evidence as it proceeds from collection at a medical facility, to inventory at a law enforcement agency, to analysis at a crime lab, and to storage or destruction.

HB 719 and its companion legislation Senate Bill 323, sponsored by Senator Stephanie Kunze, seeks to require all agencies involved in the chain-of-custody of sexual assault kits to participate in the tracking program. This statewide system is paid for by funds identified by the Ohio Attorney General’s office and will not require additional GRF dollars.

HB 719 will:

- Develop recommendations for establishing a statewide sexual assault examination kit tracking system;**
- Based on the recommendations, that will be made in consultation with the Attorney General’s advisory group on sexual assault examination kit tracking, the Attorney General shall create, operate and maintain the statewide tracking system;**
- Permit the attorney general to contract with state or private entities for the creation, operation and maintenance of the statewide tracking system.**

I am pleased to inform the committee that this aforementioned advisory group is already been established and is meeting frequently to discuss the implementation of this vital program.

The statewide tracking system will:

- **Track the status of sexual assault examination kits from the collection site through the criminal justice process, including the initial collection at medical facilities, inventory and storage by law enforcement agencies, analysis at crime laboratories and storage or destruction after completion of analysis;**
- **Allow all entities that receive, maintain, store or preserve sexual assault examination kits to update the status and location of the kits;**
- **Allow individuals to anonymously access the statewide tracking system regarding the location and status of their sexual assault examination kit.**

HB 719 will be implemented no later than one year after creation of the statewide tracking system and all entities in the chain of custody of sexual assault examination kits shall participate.

Furthermore:

- **The attorney general may adopt rules under Chapter 119 of the Revised Code to help in the implementation of the statewide system ;**
- **Stipulates that the information contained in the statewide tracking system is confidential and not subject to public disclosure in order to fully protect the privacy and identity of the victim.**

The state of Ohio, under the leadership of our Governor-Elect and Attorney General, has become a nationwide leader in the testing of these kits. HB 719 takes the next logical step by increasing transparency for the victims of these crimes and allowing them the option to track the status of their case.

As we continue to help and encourage victims of sexual assault to rebuild their lives, it is imperative that we provide them the ability to check the status of the testing of their rape kits quietly and discreetly. Affording them the opportunity to do so in a safe, secure manner ensures their privacy.

Madame Chair, thank you for the opportunity to address HB 719 today and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time. Thank you, Madame Chair.