

## **CEREMONIAL SIGNING OF PA 15-207**

### *An Act Concerning Evidence in Sexual Assault Cases*

#### **Statement**

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Behind every sexual assault evidence collection kit is a survivor who has braved coming forward in the aftermath of a significant trauma to have evidence collected from their body. Each victim who reports to the police and undergoes this invasive exam expects that their kit will be sent to the crime lab, tested, and utilized in an investigation.

The measures found in PA 15-207, An Act Concerning Evidence in Sexual Assault Cases will help ensure that it will.

This new law establishes clear and uniform time frames for sexual assault evidence collection kits to be transferred to the State crime lab and ensures that all kits will be tested in a timely manner. This is a new standard, one of the nation's strongest, and the time frames will help prevent future kit backlogs.

When we test all kits, we send a message to sexual assault victims that they matter. When we test all kits, we have a chance at finding evidence that can: establish if a sexual act occurred; corroborate a victim's account; eliminate or identify a suspect; identify someone who may have prior convictions; and link cases and identify serial rapists. When we test all kits, we increase our ability to solve crimes and hold offenders accountable. When we test all kits, we ensure that Connecticut will not have kit backlogs in the future.

Last week, CONNSACS presented a report to the Commission on the Standardization of the Collection of Evidence in Sexual Assault Investigations (the Evidence Commission), entitled *Untested: Eliminating the Backlog of Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits in Connecticut*. It highlights the findings of the Evidence Commission survey of law enforcement agencies across the state and represents our state's first snapshot of unsubmitted sexual assault kits.

The total number of kits that had not been sent to the State crime lab for testing was 879. Of the total number of kits identified, 38% are over five years old. Each kit represents a survivor. Each kit should be tested.

Law enforcement participation in Connecticut's survey was notably high and would not have been possible without collaboration and commitment from members of Evidence Commission, State's Attorneys from all thirteen judicial districts, the State Police and the members of the

Connecticut Chiefs of Police Association, who helped solicit responses and ensure participation throughout the state.

We have identified a problem together, and CONNSACS is confident that we will work together to solve it.

Accounting for, tracking and testing each kit, identifying barriers that led to the backlog, and creating victim notification protocols for survivors whose cases may be reopened is systemic work that is needed to fully address this backlog. It will take a coordinated effort among the State crime lab, the State's attorneys, law enforcement, sexual assault victim advocates and the criminal justice system to solve this problem.

That is why we at CONNSACS are so pleased with Governor Malloy's leadership in announcing his commitment to form a working group to address Connecticut's sexual assault evidence collection kit backlog in a systemic way.

The good news today is that this new law, which will prevent future backlogs, and the new working group, which will address the current backlog, have created a clear path forward for victims of sexual assault to know that their evidence collection kits will be transferred and tested, allowing them the opportunity for justice and healing.

Victims and survivors of sexual violence deserve nothing less.