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FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

House Bill 1121
Judiciary

(Delegate Conaway)

Judicial Proceedings

Sexual Assault Evidence Kits - Voluntary Payment by Victim for Testing of Kit

This bill requires that the best practices information and recommendations regarding payment for sexual assault evidence collection kits that are developed and disseminated by the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee include the development of a process to allow a victim to elect to pay for the testing of a sexual assault evidence collection kit.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Potential minimal decrease in general fund expenditures, as discussed below. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Potential minimal decrease in local law enforcement crime lab expenditures. Revenues are not affected.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Chapter 659 of 2017 established the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee. The stated purpose of the committee is to:

- increase access to justice for sexual assault victims;
- hold the perpetrators of sexual assault accountable;
- increase availability of sexual assault evidence collection exams; and
- create effective statewide policies regarding the collection, testing, and retention of medical forensic evidence in sexual assault cases.

The committee must develop and disseminate best practices information and recommendations regarding:

- the testing and retention of sexual assault evidence collection kits;
- coordination between State agencies, victim services providers, local law enforcement, and local sexual assault response teams;
- payment for sexual assault evidence collection kits;
- increasing the availability of sexual assault evidence collection exams for alleged victims of sexual assault;
- reducing the shortage of forensic nurse examiners; and
- increasing the availability of information to sexual assault victims regarding criminal prosecutions of sexual assault crimes, civil law remedies available to victims of sexual assault, sexual assault evidence collection kits, and victim rights.

The Attorney General, in consultation with the committee, is required to adopt regulations based on the committee's recommendations providing for the collection, testing, and retention of sexual assault evidence collection kits in the State. The committee must evaluate State and local funding needs to determine whether funding allocations are sufficient and appropriate to implement the best practices developed by the committee and the regulations adopted by the Attorney General. The committee's evaluation must include considerations of whether the costs associated with hospital personnel training and the availability of sexual assault examinations may be included as part of a hospital's required community benefit.

Chapter 627 of 2014 requires each hospital that provides emergency medical services to have a protocol for providing timely access to a sexual assault medical forensic examination by a forensic nurse examiner or a physician for a victim of an alleged rape or sexual offense who arrives at the hospital for treatment.

A health care provider that performs a sexual assault evidence collection kit exam on a victim of sexual assault must provide the victim with (1) contact information for the investigating law enforcement agency that the victim may contact about the status and results of the kit analysis and (2) written information describing the laws and policies governing the testing, preservation, and disposal of a sexual assault evidence collection kit. An investigating law enforcement agency that receives a sexual assault evidence collection kit, within 30 days after a request by the victim from whom the evidence was collected, must provide the victim with (1) information about the status of the kit analysis and (2) all available results of the kit analysis except results that would impede or compromise an ongoing investigation.

Chapters 158 and 159 of 2017 require that a sexual assault evidence collection kit be transferred to a law enforcement agency (1) by a hospital or child advocacy center within 30 days after a specified exam is performed or (2) by a government agency in possession of a kit, unless the agency is otherwise required to retain the kit by law or court rule.

A law enforcement agency is prohibited from destroying or disposing of a sexual assault evidence collection kit or other crime scene evidence relating to a sexual assault that has been identified by the State's Attorney as relevant to prosecution within 20 years after the evidence is collected, unless the case for which the evidence was collected resulted in a conviction and the sentence has been completed or all suspects identified by testing of a kit are deceased.

As soon as reasonably possible following collection of the sample, the Public Safety Article requires testing of DNA evidence that is collected from a crime scene or collected as evidence of sexual assault at a hospital and that a law enforcement investigator considers relevant to the identification or exoneration of a suspect.

A law enforcement agency with custody of a sexual assault evidence collection kit, on written request by the victim, must (1) notify the victim at least 60 days before the date of intended destruction or disposal of the evidence or (2) retain the evidence, as specified.

Background: Chapter 37 of 2015 required a law enforcement agency or other State or local agency charged with the maintenance, storage, and preservation of sexual assault kit evidence to conduct an inventory of all kits that were stored by the agency by January 1, 2016, and report the results to the Office of the Attorney General (OAG). Chapter 37 required OAG to prepare and transmit, by December 1, 2016, a report to the General Assembly detailing (1) the number of untested sexual assault collection kits stored by each agency; (2) the date that each untested sexual assault collection kit was collected; and (3) recommendations for addressing any backlog of untested sexual assault collection kits.

In January 2017, OAG released the required [report](#) detailing the findings of the audit, including recommendations for addressing the backlog. Major findings from the 102 law enforcement agencies surveyed revealed that approximately 3,700 untested sexual assault kits existed statewide. About 60% of the kits were collected between 2009 and 2016. Five percent were collected between 1981 and 1997, and the rest were collected between 1998 and 2009. Most jurisdictions reported no backlog of untested kits because the kits were deliberately not tested due to the agency's testing policies.

Best practices in this area include (1) retaining kits, other than anonymous kits, for at least the statute of limitations for the offense; (2) retaining all kits for at least the statute of limitations for the offense, regardless of whether a victim initially elects to prosecute; and

(3) ensuring that all kits, after testing, are retained in a police-controlled evidence storage facility, with appropriate humidity, temperature, and related environmental controls as well as chain-of-custody controls. In September 2016, Congress passed the Survivor's Bill of Rights Act of 2016, which suggests that kits be preserved for 20 years as a standard.

State Expenditures: While it is assumed that the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee and OAG can develop the required process with existing resources, compliance with the process may result in a minimal decrease in general fund expenditures for the Department of State Police (DSP) crime lab to the extent that a sexual assault victim chooses to pay for the testing of the victim's sexual assault evidence collection kit. Generally, the cost to test a sexual assault evidence collection kit is \$1,000 to \$4,000 per kit. DSP advises that, to meet standards set by DSP, testing costs approximately \$4,000 per kit.

Local Expenditures: Similarly, compliance with the required process may result in a minimal decrease in expenditures for local law enforcement agencies with a crime lab.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Health; Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services; Department of State Police; Department of Legislative Services

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