

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2018 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Third Reader

House Bill 520

(Delegate Queen, *et al.*)

Appropriations

Judicial Proceedings

Local Government - Sexual Assault Cases - Local Audits

This bill requires a county or municipality to arrange for a third-party audit of sexual assault cases reported to or investigated by the law enforcement agency of the county or municipality, when the percentage of unfounded sexual assault cases in the county or municipality exceeds the national average of unfounded sexual assault cases by 5% or more, as specified. When not required, a county or municipality may arrange for a third-party audit of sexual assault cases reported to or investigated by the law enforcement agency of the county or municipality.

The Office of the Attorney General (OAG) must establish and periodically update guidelines for (1) conducting third-party audits of sexual assault cases and (2) the maximum frequency of third-party audits of sexual assault cases.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Although OAG did not respond to requests for information about the potential fiscal impact of this bill, it is assumed that the office can implement the bill with existing budgeted resources. Revenues are not affected.

Local Effect: Potential increase in local expenditures to the extent that a third-party audit is required and must be funded by a local jurisdiction. Local revenues are not affected.
This bill may impose a mandate on a unit of local government.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Bill Summary: A third-party audit:

- must be conducted by one or more sexual assault services programs without the supervision of the county or municipality that arranged the audit;
- must include a review of police reports, notes, and any other relevant records requested by the sexual assault services program conducting the audit;
- may not disclose any personally identifiable information of a victim, witness, or suspect; and
- must include a report for the county or municipality that arranged the audit with suggestions for improvements to the responses and reporting of sexual assaults.

“Sexual assault” means a sexual crime under Title 3, Subtitle 3 of the Criminal Law Article; sexual abuse of a minor; or sexual abuse of a vulnerable adult.

“Sexual assault services program” means a program that provides direct services to victims of sexual assault and has been approved by the federally recognized State sexual assault coalition.

Current Law: Chapter 659 of 2017 requires the Attorney General, in consultation with the Maryland Sexual Assault and Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee, 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.

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 contact information for the investigating law enforcement agency that the victim may contact about the status and results of the kit analysis. 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 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 exist 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.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: HB 260 of 2017, a similar bill, passed the House with amendments and was referred to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee, but no further action was taken. Its cross file, SB 780, received an unfavorable report from the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee.

Cross File: SB 583 (Senator Ramirez) - Judicial Proceedings.

Information Source(s): Anne Arundel, Garrett, and Montgomery counties; Department of Legislative Services

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