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Judicial Proceedings Committee

Joint Committee on Children, Youth,
and Families

Joint Committee on the Chesapeake
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TESTIMONY OF SENATOR SHELLY HETTLEMAN
SB 615- Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, And Victim Services –
Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit Reporting Program

We have made great strides and reforms in recent years to address systematic issues in how we test and protect sexual assault evidence kits (SAEKs). In 2017, we enacted laws to standardize the ways in which rape kits were preserved and protected, requiring that they be tested. The same year, we also created a stakeholder group in the Office of the Attorney General to determine best practices with regard to the issue of sexual assault, bringing together law enforcement, health care providers, advocates, state's attorneys, and legislators.

In 2018, the General Assembly passed a bill requiring the Governor's Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services (GOCPYVS) to apply for federal funding to create a tracking system so that stakeholders, and most importantly survivors, would know where in the process their rape kit was. In a series of grants from the Department of Justice, Maryland has been awarded over \$5 million from the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) to test kits and to create a tracking system.

The SAEK committee spent a great deal of time and effort learning about tracking system options and worked with the Department of Information Technology to craft a procurement proposal. GOCPYVS issued a Request for Proposals many months ago and is now reviewing the applications. We anticipate an award being issued in the very near future.

The system that will be created would enable each stakeholder in the chain of custody to know what the status and location of the kit is. Health care professionals, law enforcement personnel, including forensic lab workers, prosecutors, and most importantly survivors, will be able to access the information- all while protecting the information from being made public.

The final aspect of the bill addresses the Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund, a fund we created a few years ago to enable our forensic labs - the Maryland State Police Lab and our county labs - to use these resources to purchase additional equipment, supplies, and personnel to expand testing capacity. The bill clarifies that these funds can be used for SAEKs that existed before the fund existed.

This bill is needed to provide accountability and to ensure that everyone who is a party to the chain of custody of a rape kit does their part. I urge a favorable report for SB615. Thank you.