

# Testimony

Thank you, [Chairman Last Name], [Vice Chairman Last Name] and Members of the Judiciary Committee for inviting me to speak today. My name is Sabrina Lassegue and I am here as a rape survivor.

I was only 15 years old when I was raped by three boys, right here in Bethesda, Maryland. After a trip to the hospital where I was in excruciating pain, I underwent a rape kit. At the time I felt very alone, ashamed and afraid of what would happen if news spread of what I went through. I was ridiculed and then encouraged by the medical professional I spoke with, not to press charges, so I complied. I was not aware of the legalities or my own rights surrounding being assaulted. This became an issue later on when I was ready to pursue the proper charges against my assailants, only to discover my kit had been destroyed. A 5 hour intrusive experience, down the drain. After that, I was never given the opportunity to receive justice through the legal system.

That's what can happen when rights aren't clear and backed by the full force of the law, when there is no system set in place to organize and monitor the process our justice system relies so heavily on.

Today I am testifying with Rise, the organization that championed the passage of the federal Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights in 2016, because survivors deserve equal access to justice.

Rise has passed state versions of the federal law in 40 states, including Maryland, yet no state has passed comprehensive rights for sexual assault survivors. Today I want to specifically address legislation SB 615.

This bill establishes a proper reporting program for sexual assault evidence collection kits to be traced through a system with law enforcement. This program will help identify an unknown assailant, reveal serial offenders, and exonerate the wrongfully convicted. The increase of testing kits is crucial for DNA databases to increase the number of DNA profiles, meaning more DNA from crime scenes will be linked, creating investigative leads and identifying predators—often serial offenders.

There are even financial benefits for our state that come from tracking kits. In Ohio, officials tested over 7,000 backlogged kits, investigated every lead, engaged survivors, and prosecuted cases. Through this testing, serial criminals were taken off the streets and future crimes were averted, saving the county an estimated \$38 million.

Today I am here to request the committee's support in the passing of SB615, your support for survivors everywhere and a better tomorrow, where we can have more assailants behind bars and more of the wrongfully convicted walking free.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sabrina Lassegue (438 words)