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**Working to end sexual violence in Maryland**

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**Testimony Supporting House Bill 675**  
**Lisae C. Jordan, Executive Director & Counsel**  
**Laura Jessick, Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Manager**  
February 11, 2025

The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) is a non-profit membership organization that includes the State's seventeen rape crisis centers, law enforcement, mental health and health care providers, attorneys, educators, survivors of sexual violence and other concerned individuals. MCASA includes the Sexual Assault Legal Institute (SALI), a statewide legal services provider for survivors of sexual assault. MCASA represents the unified voice and combined energy of all of its members working to eliminate sexual violence. We urge the Judiciary Committee to report favorably on House Bill 675

**House Bill 675 – Rape Kit Testing – Backstop for SAKI Project, Adding TeleSAFE**

House Bill 675 modifies an existing grant program that assists with the cost of analyzing sexual assault evidence collection kits (often called rape kits) by adding “backstop” provisions to continue testing Maryland’s rape kit backlog if (and only if) federal funds are not renewed. It also adds funding for TeleSAFE as a purpose funds can be used for.

**A Sexual Assault Survivor is Represented by Every Sexual Assault Evidence Kit**

As the Committee considers this bill, funding, numbers of kits, and bureaucracy, MCASA urges each member to keep survivors at the top of their minds. Behind each and every kit is a sexual assault survivor who submitted to a long and invasive exam after being intimately assaulted. Their choice can help keep our communities safer and take sex offenders off the streets – but only if the kits are tested and cases investigated.

**Maryland Continues to Have a Backlog of Untested Rape Kits**

Maryland has backlog of an unknown number of rape kits. Original inventories of untested kits found over 6000 kits. Additional have been found since then, increasing the inventory. Approximately 867 kits have been tested with federal funds with an additional 278 in process as of December 2024. Other kits have also been tested but it is unclear how many or what the net result of this is. A tracking system was mandated by the General Assembly and historical kits must be entered by December 31, 2025. This will, hopefully, identify all untested kits.

**Federal SAKI Grants Have Helped Reduce Maryland’s Backlog**

Maryland was awarded two SAKI (Sexual Assault Kit Initiative) grants, one in 2018 and the other in 2021. There were significant challenges with the first grant, and Maryland was advised that if the 2021 funding is not fully expended by September 30, 2025, this would significantly hamper the State’s ability to seek future federal funding.

The SAKI project includes not only kit analysis, but also 2 investigators employed by the Attorney General's Office (about \$200,000 annually), and a Victim Notification Team and outreach (about \$230,000 annually). Contractors are also retained by the Maryland State Police and supplement their staff, however this staff can currently be covered by the Fund.

### **Maryland Must Apply for Additional Federal Funding in 2025**

#### **HB675 Continues Work on the Backlog IF Federal Funds are Not Awarded**

MCASA is hopeful that additional federal funds will be awarded to complete testing of the State's backlog of rape kits, support survivors, and prosecute offenders. This is not a given, however, and HB675 creates a plan to continue the SAKI project to test the backlog, assist with investigation, and notify and support survivors.

### **Maryland Should Fulfill Its Promise to Survivors**

Maryland failed survivors by allowing a backlog of over 6000 rape kits to develop. It is working to repair this failure and not only test kits, but also investigate cases, prosecute when appropriate and support survivors throughout.

If the state does not act, it could fail again. In an effort to expend federal funds, kits are being tested without the usual front-end investigation. This means the investigation must be completed after testing. If the SAKI project doesn't continue, Maryland will end up with both the remaining untested kit backlog and a new backlog of tested but uninvestigated kits that survivors know nothing about.

### **HB675 is Survivor-Centered and Supports Ending the Backlog and Increasing Exams**

This bill will require continued funding of the parts of the SAKI project that are not currently eligible for the state Rape Kit Testing Fund IF:

- The federal funds are not continued;
- The state allocates money to the Rape Kit Testing Fund; and
- There are untested kits collected prior to the mandate to test all kits.

The entire cost of continued funding is under \$500,000. The Fund has \$3.5million allocated to it in the proposed budget books. We have been advised that there is more than \$4m unexpended in the fund. The Governor has proposed taking some funds for other uses, however the legislature has not yet decided this; if the Fund is wiped out, noting in this bill mandate funding for anything. Additionally HB675 does not create ongoing funding, it ends once the backlog is cleared.

### **Increased Access to Exams**

HB675 also expands the purposes of the fund to include **support for the Peer-to-Peer TeleSAFE project** the General Assembly created last session. TeleSAFE will allow a qualified health care provider with the survivor in one location to consult with a forensic nurse examiner in another location to provide a SAFE. This will expand access to exams and reduce burdens on survivors. MCASA strongly encourages this expansion to help improve a long-standing structural obstacle to survivors seeking forensic exams.

**Sponsor Amendments:** MCASA fully supports proposed sponsor amendments clarifying that current work under the fund will continue (deleting brackets on lines 25 and 27), retaining language permitting expenditures on new purposes, and authorizing grants of up to 36 months.

**The Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault urges  
the Judiciary Committee  
to report favorably on House Bill 675**