

J. SANDY BARTLETT
Legislative District 32
Anne Arundel County

Vice Chair
Judiciary Committee



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THE MARYLAND HOUSE OF DELEGATES
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

TO: CHAIR LUKE CLIPPINGER and Members of the Judiciary Committee

FROM: Delegate J. Sandy Bartlett, Esq.

HB675: Public Safety - Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund - Alterations

Chairman Clippinger and Members of the Committee, Delegate Sandy Bartlett, from Anne Arundel County. Today, I urge a favorable vote on HB675 which will ensure continued funding of the functions for which the Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund provides and expands purpose of the fund.

Since 2018, Maryland has been utilizing federal funds from the “Sexual Assault Kit Initiative or “SAKI” grants and state grants (known as the Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund or “SAK-T”) to law enforcement agencies to pay for testing of rape kits by forensic labs, address the significant backlog of unsubmitted and untested sexual assault evidence kits and provide advocacy services. One of the federal funding sources is set to conclude in September 2025, thus this bill expands the purpose of the SAK-T funding from the state.

There is still an enormous amount of work that needs to be done. This is meticulous work; it takes time, it takes collaboration, and it takes compassion. As of January 2023, the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) reported that there are still over 6,818 unsubmitted and 725 partially tested rape kits in the state, making Maryland one of the most backlogged states in the country. With nearly 50% of women in Maryland reporting experiences of sexual violence, and 27% reporting being victims of rape, it is critical that we continue to prioritize kit testing and support for survivors.

HB675 expands the purpose of the Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund to allow the Office of the Attorney General to assist law enforcement in the investigations of crimes involving sexual assault evidence collection kits that were collected before 2020 and have not been tested. Additionally, the bill will enable MCASA, the federally recognized state sexual assault coalition to continue providing victim notification and support services and finally, it provides support to peer-to-peer telehealth programs that we passed last year. The purpose of the non-lapsing fund is not to support the sexual assault evidence tracking system as there is other funding for that program.

The Rape Kit Testing Fund is essential to keeping the promises we made to survivors, and we must ensure that we continue to provide the funding needed to complete the assignment.

For these reasons, I urge a favorable vote. Thank you.