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Board of Directors:

April 22, 2019

Mariska Hargitay  
Founder & President

Rep. Margo McDermed  
211-N Stratton Office Building  
Springfield, IL 62706

Debbie Millman  
Chair

Sukey Novogratz  
Vice Chair

Dear Rep. McDermed,

Lauran Bromley  
Secretary

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports H.B. 1440, a bill calling for the creation of a statewide rape kit tracking system.

Jessica Ambrose

Beth Armstrong

Every 98 seconds, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States. In the immediate aftermath of a sexual assault, a victim may choose to undergo a medical forensic examination to collect DNA evidence left behind in the assault. A doctor or nurse will collect and preserve this evidence in a sexual assault evidence kit, often referred to as a rape kit. However, after leaving the hospital, most survivors are never contacted about the status of their rape kit.

Jenny Belushi

Cynthia Erivo

Linda Fairstein

Erica Fisher

Peter Hermann

Danielle Herzlich

Mark Herzlich

H.B. 1440 would require the Department of State Police (ISP) to develop rules to implement a rape kit tracking system per the recommendations of the Sexual Assault Evidence Tracking and Reporting Commission. The system, which is to be developed and administered by ISP, must allow for survivors to opt in for automatic notifications when status updates are entered, if the system allows, and provide a mechanism for survivors to enter the system and access only their information. Medical facilities would be required to participate, and the system must contain reporting functions including a function allowing law enforcement to produce their annual rape kit inventory. Ensuring that survivors and all stakeholders in the criminal justice process can know the location and status of collected rape kits will bring transparency to rape kit processing and prevent a backlog from happening again.

Valli Kaleli Kanuha, Ph.D.

Andrea McTamane

Rev. Al Miles

Heather Mnuchin

Pamela Murphy

Tom Nunan

Chauncey Parker

Amanda Stephens

Noelle Wolf

Kym Worthy

Illinois was the first state in the country to address rape kit handling processes and enact reform in 2010. However, according to a November 2018 *Chicago Tribune* article, in Illinois, "the average time to process DNA evidence for all cases, including sexual assaults, is 285 days. Joyful Heart recommends rape kits be tested within 30 days of receipt. To eventually meet this goal, ISP requires sufficient funding to shorten testing turnaround times, and we strongly support fully funding ISP.

According to H.B. 1440, funds for the system are to be derived from ISP funds and state appropriations. We encourage the eligible state agencies and stakeholders to apply for federal grants such as the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence-Inventory, Tracking, and Reporting (SAFE-ITR) grant and the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grant to supplement the necessary resources to both shorten testing times and operate a tracking system. Unequivocally, survivors must have an online system through which they can track their kit, but it is also imperative that their kit is tested as swiftly as possible.

Recent research suggests that testing rape kits can be one of the most prudent uses of public funds, providing up to a 65,000% return on investment. Testing rape kits identifies serial offenders, links cases, and exonerates the wrongfully convicted. These improvements to public safety and trust in the criminal justice system are certainly worth the investment.

Thank you for your leadership on this issue. We look forward to the enactment of H.B.1440 and stand ready to assist you and your colleagues in offering a path to healing and justice for survivors in Illinois.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lily Rocha". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Lily Rocha  
Associate Director, Policy & Advocacy  
The Joyful Heart Foundation