



April 12, 2016

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Assemblyman Brian Maienschein
California State Capitol, Suite 4139
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Support of AB2499 — Sexual Assault Evidence Kits Tracking Program

The Joyful Heart Foundation supports Assembly Bill 2499, legislation that would give survivors of sexual assault in California access to information about the status of their rape kits and bring accountability to the rape kit testing process.

Every year, thousands of individuals take the important step of reporting their rapes to the police and submitting to a lengthy exam to collect evidence in a rape kit. Right now, in the majority of these cases, survivors are never informed about the status of their cases. One of the top priorities within rape kit reform is to ensure survivors have an opportunity to check the progress of their kits.

In California, survivors have the right to request information about their rape kits, including whether it has been tested or entered into the DNA database under the Sexual Assault Victims' DNA Bill of Rights. We are pleased to support AB2499, legislation that would realize the promise of this law by giving survivors access to the existing Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Tracking (SAFE-T) system used by the CA Department of Justice (CALDOJ). While this system is currently only being used by CALDOJ labs, another pending bill, AB1838, would require all California law enforcement to adopt SAFE-T. These bills together would create a statewide system that promotes transparency and accountability around rape kit testing and brings answers to survivors.

Just last week, Joyful Heart released a new research report on victim notification, conducted in partnership with Dr. Courtney Ahrens at California State University at Long Beach. Our focus groups, led by our Los Angeles office, revealed that survivors feel very strongly that the information about their cases, including the status of their evidence, is important to healing and the information belongs to them. The majority of our participants widely supported offering survivors the choice about whether and when to receive information about their cases. Offering a way to opt-in or opt-out of receiving information was viewed as the only viable way to ensure that a survivor's unique needs are met. Being able to track their DNA kits helps sexual assault survivors gain control — something that was lost during the attack they endured — over the information they receive and they can choose to log in or not.

This critical bill will bring much-needed systemic change to the way rape evidence is handled and accounted for. The survivors of California deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ilse Knecht".

Ilse Knecht
Director of Policy & Advocacy
Joyful Heart Foundation