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January 18, 2019

Representative Gilda Cobb-Hunter
309C Blatt Bldg.
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Representative Cobb-Hunter:

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports H. 3309, which would call for development of a statewide rape kit tracking system and require semiannual inventory reports, increasing transparency and accountability in South Carolina.

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." Most survivors, after leaving the hospital, are never contacted about the status of their rape kit. In addition, many law enforcement departments across the country have no reliable way of keeping track of rape kits and may not know how many untested kits are in their possession.

H. 3309 would bring about necessary rape kit reforms. This bill would require the State Law Enforcement Division (SLED) to create and operate a statewide rape kit tracking system to follow kits throughout the criminal justice process. Entities handling rape kits would be required to participate in the system, and the system must contain a secure victim portal to allow survivors to obtain information about their rape kit, which our research has shown can be imperative for a survivor's healing. The bill additionally requires SLED to produce semiannual reports detailing critical information such as: the total number of kits in the system, the total number of kits surpassing six months since entry into the system that have yet to be tested, and the total number of kits destroyed. These reports will provide survivors, legislators, stakeholders, and the general public with invaluable data about the rape kit handling process. We recommend ensuring kits collected before the date of adoption are entered into the system to provide an accurate inventory report.

H. 3099 includes critical tracking and inventory provisions, and we thank you for your leadership on this bill. 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 handling process and provide the public with an accurate count of untested rape kits in the state. The Joyful Heart Foundation stands ready to assist you in your efforts to end the backlog in South Carolina and bring justice and healing to sexual assault survivors.

Sincerely,

Ilse Knecht
Director of Policy & Advocacy