



32 West 22nd Street, 4th Floor
New York, New York 10010
(212) 475-2026
joyfulheartfoundation.org

Board of Directors:

Mariska Hargitay
Founder & President

Christina Norman
Chair

Sukey Novogratz
Vice Chair

Tom Nunan
Secretary

Karen Polivka
Treasurer

Jessica Ambrose

Beth Armstrong

Durk Barnhill

Jenny Belushi

Shanna Brooks

Jill Eisenstadt-Chayot

Michele Dominick

Linda Fairstein

Erica Fisher

Peter Hermann

Danielle Herzlich

Mark Herzlich

Valli Kalei Kanuha, Ph.D.

Michael King

Andrea McTamaney

Rev. Al Miles

Debbie Millman

Heather Mnuchin

Chauncey Parker

Stanley Schneider

Andrew Schwartzberg

Carrie Shumway

Amanda Stephens

Noelle Wolf

Maile M. Zambuto
Chief Executive Officer

July 10, 2017

Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 94249

Dear Assemblymember Gonzalez Fletcher,

The Joyful Heart Foundation supports **Assembly Bill 1312**, which enacts critical rights for sexual assault survivors and establishes rape kit evidence preservation policies.

Every two minutes, 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 evidence left behind in the assault. A doctor or nurse will conduct the four-to-six-hour examination and will preserve this evidence in what is commonly called a rape kit. Survivors—and the public—expect that these kits will be used to apprehend offenders. Far too often, these kits are not submitted to crime labs for testing and are simply shelved in law enforcement storage.

Most survivors, after leaving the hospital, are never contacted about the status of their rape kit. In 2016, Joyful Heart partnered with researchers at California State University, Long Beach to conduct research in victim notification. This research found that, for survivors who want to know about their case, not having access to such information can severely hamper recovery. Access to information about the status and location of their rape kits can help survivors counter the loss of self-determination and control that is often at the core of a sexual assault experience.

A.B. 1312 will ensure that survivors are informed of their rights. Current California law provides that, upon request, law enforcement “should” inform survivors of the status and results of testing their kits. A.B. 1312 amends this “should” to “shall,” ensuring that survivors who wish to receive information about their cases can do so. The bill also requires every local law enforcement agency, in consultation with sexual assault experts, to develop a card explaining the rights of sexual assault survivors and local resources available to them. Every medical provider and law enforcement professional would be required to provide these cards to survivors at initial point of contact.

Additionally, the bill requires rape kits and other crime scene evidence to be preserved for at least 20 years, and requires notification in advance of evidence destruction, keeping the door to justice open longer for survivors.

Comprehensive rape kit reform will require the submission and testing every rape kit, tracking those kits from collection to analysis, and transparency and accountability from all criminal justice and medical professionals that handle rape kits. A.B. 1312 is a critical step, and we thank you for your leadership on this bill.

The Joyful Heart Foundation stands ready to assist you in your efforts to end the backlog in California and offer a path to healing and justice to all sexual assault survivors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ilse Knecht". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ilse Knecht
Director, Policy & Advocacy