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

Dear Representative Cobb-Hunter,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports your legislation, House Bill 3309, which would call for the development of a statewide rape kit tracking system and require semiannual inventory reports, increasing transparency and accountability in South Carolina. Current state law does not require counting, tracking, or testing rape kits. The extent of the untested kit backlog in South Carolina is unknown. Best estimates report 1,800 untested kits. These kits represent a missed opportunity to increase public safety and bring answers and justice to sexual assault survivors.

Every 92 seconds, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States. Every year approximately 2,400 survivors in South Carolina report sexual assault to the police. In the immediate aftermath, 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.B. 3309 would bring necessary rape kit reforms to South Carolina. 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 anonymously 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 also strongly support the bill section ensuring kits collected before the date of adoption are entered into the system to provide an accurate inventory report.

Enacting H.B. 3099 will be a critical first step towards comprehensive rape kit reform in South Carolina. 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
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