



320 7th Avenue, #161
Brooklyn, NY 11215
(212) 475-2026
joyfulheartfoundation.org

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May 8, 2024

Alaska State Senate
State Capitol, 120 4th Street
Juneau, AK 99801

Honorable Members of the Senate,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports House Bill 275, which would codify the statewide rape kit tracking system into law and grant survivors the right to know the status and location of their kits. To date, 36 states and Washington, D.C. passed laws to require implementation of a statewide rape kit tracking system. With HB275, Alaska is poised to join these states in addressing the backlog in a transparent way.

Every 68 seconds, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States. There are around 1000 reported sexual assaults in Alaska every year. In the immediate aftermath of a sexual assault, a victim may choose to undergo a four-to-six-hour medical forensic examination to collect DNA evidence left behind in the assault, where the evidence is collected in a sexual assault examination kit ("rape kit"). Most survivors, after leaving the hospital, are never contacted about the status of their rape kit. 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.

In 2021, Governor Mike Dunleavy announced that the state would establish a rape kit tracking system. In July 2023, the Alaska Department of Public Safety's Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System went live, however, currently the system is not mandated by law. HB275 would codify the system and mandate participation into law, which will ensure that all the relevant agencies that handle rape kits comply with the law. In addition, establishing the system in statute will ensure stability when leadership or priorities shift from year to year. Mandating all agencies to participate in the system by law prevents compliance discrepancies in the state.

The bill also requires hospitals to notify law enforcement within 7 days of collecting a reported kit, and grants survivors the right to know the status and location of their kit whether by calling or walking into their local precinct. Some survivors may not have a secure internet connection to check the status of their kits safely, some may not have access to a device, while some others might prefer to call their precincts or go in person. Our laws should respond to survivors'

different needs, and should not discriminate against them based on their access to secure technology. Granting survivors “the right to know the testing date and location of their sexual assault examination kit” in statute ensures that.

HB275 includes critical tracking and victim’s rights provisions. With this bill, Alaska will complete all [six-pillars of rape kit reform](#). We urge the Senate to vote in favor of this important legislation. The Joyful Heart Foundation thanks you for your efforts on this issue. We stand ready to assist you in creating safer communities and offering a path to healing and justice to all sexual assault survivors in Alaska.

Sincerely,

Burcu Sagioglu
Policy and Advocacy Associate
Joyful Heart Foundation
(212) 475-2026
b.sagioglu@joyfulheartfoundation.org