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Room 30, State House
115 State Street
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Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports H.878, a bill that, among other provisions, ensures that sexual assault survivors have the right to know the status and location of their sexual assault evidence collection kits.

Every 68 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 conduct the examination, which can last between four and six hours. The examiner collects and preserves 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. Our [2016 research](#) in victim notification found that, for survivors who want to know about their case, not having access to such information can severely hamper recovery. Survivors in our study strongly asserted that information about their case “belongs” to them and limiting access to information is “unacceptable and misguided.” Access to information about the status and location of their rape kits, as H.878 proposes, can help survivors counter the loss of self-determination and control that is often at the core of a sexual assault experience.

The Joyful Heart Foundation thanks you for your efforts to bring a path to justice and healing to all sexual assault survivors in Vermont. We stand ready to assist you in enacting these necessary reforms.

Sincerely,

Mateo Cello

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