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Verbal Testimony In Support of House Bill 2581

Delivered by Burcu Sagiroglu, MPP

February 12, 2025

Good morning Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Powell, and members of the Committee. Thank you to Representative Bliss for this important bill, and allowing me to testify today. I am Burcu Sagiroglu, Policy and Advocacy Manager at the Joyful Heart Foundation.

Joyful Heart Foundation was founded by “Law & Order: SVU” actress and advocate Mariska Hargitay. Since 2010, we made ending the backlog of untested rape kits our top priority.

Since 2015, Joyful Heart has been supporting reform efforts in Arizona along with the Arizona Coalition to End Sexual and Domestic Violence, the legislature, and the Governor’s office.

We strongly support SB2581 which would codify the rape kit tracking system that is already used in the rest of the state, and ensure that all the relevant agencies participate. Today, 5 years after the statewide system, the Phoenix Police Department does not participate in the system. Phoenix is the largest jurisdiction in the state where the majority of sexual assaults happen, and where the rape kit testing timeline continues to be more than a year.

Every single rape kit represents a survivor who after what’s likely the worst experience of their life has allowed evidence to be collected from their body. Survivors feel strongly that the information about their kits belongs to them. Access to this information is central to their healing and should not depend on their zip code.

43 states including Florida, Maryland, and Texas already have implemented a statewide rape kit tracking system with full participation across the state, and Arizona can achieve that too.

In 2024, 229 survivors in Arizona accessed the tracking system almost 1700 times, meanwhile survivors of more than 1000 reported rapes in Phoenix did not have access to this information.

We cannot let the survivor’s zip code determine their access to rights. This bill will ensure all survivors in Arizona can track their kits, while the state as a whole has a more transparent way of rape kit handling.

Thank you for your time and focus on this crucial issue for the survivors. I am available to answer any questions.