



HB1268 - Public Safety - Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund – Established

Presented to Hon. Maggie McIntosh and Members of the House Appropriations Committee
February 21, 2019 1:00 p.m.

POSITION: SUPPORT

NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland **urges the House Appropriations Committee a favorable report on HB1268 – Public Safety – Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund – Established**, sponsored by Shelly Hettleman. With the continued failure of police departments across the country in the timely processing of evidence in rape and sexual assault cases, establishing this fund will help support law enforcement and survivors to use such kits while seeking sexual and reproductive justice in Maryland.

Our organization is an advocate for reproductive health, rights, and justice. We strive to ensure every individual has the freedom to decide if, when, and how to plan for their future and their families. This begins with honoring the sexual and reproductive agency of every individual and the right to decide where, when, how, and with whom one should have sex. Rape is a violation of that agency.

Sexual violence is a widespread issue. The Centers for Disease Control reports that more than 1 in 4 women and more than 1 in 10 men have experienced sexual and physical violence by an intimate partner.¹ Sexual violence from an intimate partner asserts control over a survivor's reproductive autonomy, increasing the likelihood of unintended pregnancies and transmission of sexually transmitted diseases. Additionally, mental and physical health can be adversely impacted leading to PTSD, anxiety related to sexual activity with future partners, and preterm birth.² The physical and emotional experiences of sexual violence can limit the reproductive freedom of survivors and the trauma be carried on for years after an assault.

In January 2017, the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee in the Attorney General's Office released a report that found approximately 3,700 rape kits were left untested statewide.³ As of January 2019, that number has increased to over 6,000 untested rape kits in the state.⁴ HB1268 would implement the Rape Kit Testing Grant Fund to pay for testing of these backlogged and future evidence collection kits.

As sexual assault evidence collection kits are an important tool used to identify perpetrators and corroborate a survivor's testimony should they choose to utilize the criminal justice system, HB1268 ensures that victims of sexual violence have fewer hurdles in the processes of seeking justice by providing this essential funding to law enforcement. With these funds, the backlog of sexual assault evidence kits may finally be reduced. For these reasons, **NARAL Pro-Choice Maryland urges a favorable report on HB1268**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ Centers for Disease Control (2014). *National Data on Intimate Partner Violence, Sexual Violence, and Stalking*. <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/nisvs-fact-sheet-2014.pdf>

² Chisholm, C., Bullock, L., Ferguson II, J. (August 2017) Intimate partner violence and pregnancy: epidemiology and impact. *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology*. 217(2) p. 141-144.

³ Frosh, B. (January 1, 2017). *Statewide Accounting of Untested Sexual Assault Evidence Kits in the State of Maryland*. Report of the Office of the Attorney General. http://www.marylandattorneygeneral.gov/Reports/Rape_Kit_Report.pdf

⁴ Rentz, C. (December 3, 2018) "Thousands More Untested Rape Kits Revealed in Maryland as Authorities Ramp up Efforts to Process Evidence." *The Baltimore Sun*. <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/crime/bs-mduntested-rape-kits-20181107-story.html>