



WISCONSIN COALITION AGAINST SEXUAL ASSAULT

Key Points on Addressing Wisconsin Rape Kits

February 8, 2017

Recently, there have been many questions regarding rape kits in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) offers the following information to inform the public discussion. You can also see our letter to the editor on the matter, [Survivors Should Be at the Center](#), published recently by the Green Bay Press Gazette. Thank you in advance!

Introduction

WCASA and sexual assault victim advocates have been working with the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Response Team (AG SART) since 2012 to address un-submitted rape kits. These kits are located at law enforcement agencies and hospitals throughout the state and have yet to be sent to a crime lab for testing.

Among other accomplishments, the AG SART developed two important pieces of the puzzle to address these issues. This includes the By Your Side awareness campaign, which is a survivor-centered, trauma-informed approach to address the un-submitted kits. The other critical piece is a new protocol to ensure Wisconsin will not have this problem with un-submitted kits again. The protocol is also designed to ensure survivors who present at a hospital receive consistent information about their options for having a medical forensic exam and participating in the criminal justice process.

By Your Side Campaign

As part of this work, WCASA recently collaborated with the Wisconsin Department of Justice to launch the By Your Side awareness campaign. This campaign provides survivors the choice to access information about their kit and the choice to connect with local sexual assault service provider organizations. These organizations can help survivors heal and help them navigate the criminal justice system. Survivors can seek information about their kit and be connected to support by calling 1-800-446-6564 or going to ByYourSideWI.org.

Wisconsin's Approach to Addressing Un-submitted Kits

Wisconsin is not unique in facing the challenge of un-submitted rape kits. In fact, the state has learned from the work done by organizations like the Joyful Heart Foundation and other communities that have faced this challenge. Many of those communities chose to test all kits in what has been called a forklift approach. In Wisconsin, we decided to design a process – the By Your Side campaign and resources – that provides survivors with as much autonomy and empowerment as possible. Furthermore, unlike many other communities, Wisconsin has dedicated resources to support survivors who will be impacted by learning about their un-submitted kits.

Addressing Un-submitted Kits Has Taken Time

The AG SART wisely took the time to deliberately address the highly complex work of addressing un-submitted kits, to ensure survivors can be fully informed about their kits, their options, and available resources. This work has also taken time because we needed to develop procedures and protocols so that when kits started being tested, survivors had information ahead of time and sexual assault service provider agencies were prepared for when survivors called them.

New Protocol for Addressing Rape Kits

The AG SART developed a new protocol for survivors seeking a medical forensic exam and to ensure we will not have another problem with un-submitted kits again. This protocol keeps survivors at the center by empowering them to take back some measure of control and autonomy, which is often lost with sexual assault.

Under the protocol, survivors have the following choices:

- 1) have a medical exam only, with no report to law enforcement;
- 2) have the exam, have a kit collected, and report the assault to law enforcement, triggering testing of the kit; or
- 3) have the exam, have a kit collected, and have the hospital send the kit to the crime lab for storage for up to 10 years.
 - With the third option, if a survivor decides to report the assault to law enforcement within those 10 years, the kit would be tested.

For More Information

If you are a survivor and would like information about the status of your rape kit, please call 1-800-446-6564 or go to ByYourSideWI.org.

If you are seeking support from a sexual assault service provider, please use this page: <http://www.wcasa.org/pages/SASPs.php>.

If you have questions about the work described above, please contact:

- Wisconsin Department of Justice, Office of Crime Victim Services
 - 1-800-446-6564
- The Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
 - Ian Henderson, attorney@wcasa.org, 608-257-1516
 - Dominic Holt, dominich@wcasa.org, 608-257-1516