

Burcu Sagiroglu
Joyful Heart Foundation
LD 2129

Testimony in Support of LD2129

Good morning Chair Beebe-Center, Chair Salisbury, and members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity and for listening to my testimony in favor of LD2129.

My name is Burcu Sagiroglu, a 2017 graduate of Colby College. I am the policy and advocacy associate at the Joyful Heart Foundation.

We are a national organization founded by “Law & Order: SVU” actress and advocate Mariska Hargitay, with a mission to support sexual assault survivors’ healing and search for justice. Since 2016, we have made ending the backlog of untested rape kits our top priority. Our campaign is extremely successful and we have been involved in rape kit reform in almost every state in the country. We are excited to be in front of this committee today.

Our organization strongly supports LD2129, which requires the establishment of a rape kit tracking system with a victim portal. This is a recognized federal best practice to improve the way forensic evidence is handled, and ensures transparency and accountability. It also follows the recommendations in a 2018 study report by MECASA and the Muskie School.

A rape kit tracking system is a web based system that allows victims, law enforcement agents, hospital and lab staff to follow the path of a rape kit throughout the whole process: from collection at the hospital, through analysis, and to final disposition.

An important feature of tracking systems is the victim portal, which allows survivors to see where their kit is at all times. This is crucial to their healing and well-being, as it allows them to control when they obtain critical information about their kits. Joyful Heart’s research on victim notification found that access to information about a survivor’s kit can counter the loss of control and self-determination that are at the core of the sexual assault experience. Sadly, many survivors leave the hospital and never hear about their rape kit again.

We must remember what survivors go through to have these kits done. It's not an easy process and survivors tell us the kit belongs to them, that part of them is in that kit. Sexual assault survivors in Maine deserve to know where their kit is at all times. Just like you can follow your package on amazon, a victim should be able to track their rape kit.

What’s more, tracking systems make law enforcement and prosecutors’ jobs easier by allowing them to follow crucial evidence from start to finish.

We also strongly support requiring a statewide inventory of untested rape kits in law enforcement possession. A thorough count of rape kits provides a full picture of rape kit submission and testing procedures across the state, and guides legislatures as they appropriate and target resources.

40 states have implemented a rape kit tracking system. We hope the committee votes favorably on this bill, so Maine can be the next state to implement one. Survivors deserve nothing less.

Thank you again for your time. I am available to answer any questions the committee may have.