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Testimony of the Maine Municipal Association

In Support For

LD 2129 - An Act to Establish a Statewide Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Kit Tracking System and Conduct an Inventory of Existing Forensic Examination Kits in the Possession of Law Enforcement

January 29, 2024

Sen. Beebe-Center, Rep. Salisbury and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, my name is Rebecca Graham, and I am submitting testimony in support for LD 2129, on behalf of the Maine Municipal Association, which represents the interests of municipal government before the Legislature. The positions of the Association are established by our 70-member Legislative Policy Committee (LPC), who are elected by the councils and selectboards of municipalities in each of Maine's 35 Senate districts.

Municipal officials support all efforts to increase the comfort that victims feel heard and are provided agency to access all possible avenues to justice in what remains a very perpetrator centered justice system. Officials believe that state-wide resources need investment to make these incredibly challenging cases more successful in prosecution and an inventory system that provides the victim a longer time to feel agency to report their incident and law enforcement statewide knowledge of the location of a kit once it is collected.

The act of reporting and process of pursuing justice is equally as traumatizing for a survivor of sexual assault. Knowing the complex needs of survivors and the support individual must have in place to feel comfortable in reporting their sexual assault, the elongated retention is vital to allow them to prepare on their own time without a brief time limit on the ability to access or have their evidence tested. Officials recognize that lengthening the retention time period this places the individual in the best possible mindset to pursue justice as well.

Officials in communities with a hospital recognize that this places an outsized burden on the agency in that jurisdiction for longer storage of sexual assault kits. During the discussions around this bill and in consultation with their municipal police leadership, they learned that law enforcement support both the tracking system and any proposal that provides greater resources for testing that is not currently possible. With full knowledge that the longer period of retention of these kits, officials were initially concerned that this may be a greater burden on small agencies such as those in the midcoast who are often not operating on a 24-hour level. Their police leadership did not share these concerns, and many admitted they did not realize that the current retention period was so low.

For all of these reasons, officials support this initiative and believe tracking on a state-wide level is a sensible supportive path to increase access to justice for sexual assault survivors.