

January 18, 2024

Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: LD 2129 Sex Assault Kit Bill

Dear Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Salisbury and Members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

My name is Christian Behr and I come before you today in support of LD 2129, the Sex Assault kit tracking bill. I have served in Maine Law Enforcement since 1988. I was a reserve officer from 1988 until 1995 when I was hired full time at the Augusta Police Department. Upon retirement in 2020 as the Bureau Chief of Information services I was hired full time as a Domestic Violence Investigator detective working on Domestic Violence (DV), sex assault and child/elder abuse. I continue to serve as a domestic violence investigator today.

There are 23 sworn domestic violence investigators statewide working for 17 different agencies who are also involved with investigating crimes against the person. I have heard many of them express support for sexual assault kit tracking initiatives, and they often cite one or two reasons; first, kit tracking is an important and necessary process for survivors because it provides them with information, a sense of control, they know law enforcement is taking their case seriously. Second, kit tracking systems support the integrity of the chain of custody of evidence and transparency in the process of sex assault crime investigation.

While at Augusta Police I was part of a team that managed the department being accredited through the Maine Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (MLEAP). One of the accreditation standards is focused on storage of evidence and property within a Police Department. Our Police Department was accredited in 2020 due in large part to the 100% inventory conducted which included Sex Assault Kit's (SAK's). That experience solidified my belief that accountability is paramount when it comes to proper evidence handling and storage because only about 20% of all kits are brought to the crime lab. A sex assault kit tracking system encourages accountability.

Additionally, as the Law Enforcement member of the DHHS SAFE advisory board I have served for the past two years on our Sex Kit tracking subcommittee. As a subcommittee member, I have attended meetings with stakeholders about sex kit tracking and being present during talks on what other states have implemented for sex kit tracking and been present during talks on what other states have implemented for sex kit tracking. During these meetings I have heard how kit tracking systems benefit both survivors and personnel who work with them. Law Enforcement officers say sex kit tracking helps with investigative efficiency, storage, and processing. Having the information about where the kit is in the investigatory process should always be a best practice.

Law Enforcement officers are trained in Maine to transfer kits from hospitals to law enforcement evidence rooms. They also deliver kits to the Crime Lab when they need to be tested. These transfer processes maintain the chain of custody and support successful prosecution. Police want to do the right thing when it comes to this partnership between survivors, hospitals, other law enforcement agencies,

the crime lab and the District Attorney's Office in a multi-disciplinary way and a sexual assault kit tracking system is critically important. Approving this bill and having consistency throughout the State of Maine will enable transparency, improve survivor access for accountability, fulfill the promise of the 2018 Maine Sexual Assault Kit Study, as well as survivor significance. Sex kit tracking is recognized nationally and in Maine as best practice.

Thank you.

Det. Christian J. Beltr

Investigations

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