

Good morning, Chair Senator Beebe-Center, Chair Representative Salisbury, and members of the Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

I am here to speak with you in favor of LD 2129 to establish a sex crime kit tracking system in our state.

My name is Mary Ann Ordelt. I work at the University of New England School of Nursing Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program. I have been a Nurse for 32 years and a Forensic Nurse for 15 years. A Forensic Nurse provides comprehensive care for patients who have survived sexual assault; they can collect potential evidence and work with the legal system when appropriate. Becoming a credentialed forensic nurse in Maine is a rigorous process.

It is a privilege and honor to provide medical and forensic care for patients who have suffered sexual assault. Upon arrival at the emergency department, medical care is a priority as survivors may have life-threatening injuries... This care is trauma-informed and patient-centered.

Adult survivors may report their assault to a law enforcement agency. If they do, the agency with jurisdiction over the case will take possession of the kit. Sometimes, the kits are transported to the lab, and frequently, for many reasons, they are not.

However, in Maine, survivors are not required to report their assault to the police; these cases are called 'anonymous.' The patient's name is not linked to the evidence. The kit is identified with a number, which is also documented in the patient's medical record.

Important and relevant recent survey data from survivors indicates that nearly all survivors believe their kit will be tested.

The survey started only a few months ago.

The current data is from 4 hospitals. The number of responses is small – only 18. But it is ongoing. To date:

- 17 of the 18 survivors believed their kit will go to the lab.
- 1 was unsure if it would.
- All 17 wanted the kit to go to the lab for testing.
- 17 wanted to know the results of any findings.
- 1 did not.
- 17 said that if evidence were found, they would report their case to the police.
- 1 was unsure.
- 12 had already reported their case to the police.
- 5 had not reported to the police But probably would if evidence were found. The survey results are the voice of some survivors in Maine.

Every sex crime kit represents a human being who has suffered an unimaginable, life-altering trauma. Many survivors want their kit information, and all survivors deserve to have it. Yet, many never hear about their kit after leaving the hospital. Healing can be promoted for survivors

when they know the status of their kit, while the lack of information “can be harmful to their wellbeing” (Joyful Heart Foundation, 2022). As healthcare providers, we see this as a public health problem and strongly support this bill.

Thank you for the opportunity and for listening to my testimony.

Sincerely,

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