



Cumberland County District Attorney's Office

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Testimony in Support LD 2129

Tina Panayides

ADA, Cumberland County (Prosecutorial District 2)
SAFE Advisory Board Chair

Good Afternoon Senator Rotundo, Senator Beebe-Center, Representative Sachs, Representative Salisbury, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Services and Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

My name is Tina Panayides and I am here to speak in my professional capacity in favor of fully funding LD 2129 with a Forensic Chemist II position. I serve both as Chair of the Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (or SAFE), Advisory Board, and as a prosecutor in the Cumberland County DA's sexual assault unit.

Maine is now the **only** state not to have adopted any reforms recognized as necessary to this work. *(Please see graphic below from the JHF website and printed with permission.)*

In response to this need, our Board created a kit subcommittee in 2021. We quickly heard from other states that legislation mandating tracking, an inventory, and testing of 'reported' kits would help to move this work forward. (I can give a more detailed explanation of what happens currently under our statutes, after my testimony if you like.) **This bill is an important first step in reaching some of these goals.**

The data we do have is disturbing: around **80% of kits** sent out for evidence collection each year are going into a 'black hole,' their locations and status completely unknown. These kits potentially contain evidence of crimes, and based on other states' data, likely evidence of serial offenders.

Also: each kit represents a person. There is a human cost, and a risk to public safety, when we are not tracking and inventorying kits.

Newly implemented survey postcards are being collected by UNE after SAFE exams from hospitals. This recent data tells us that: 21 out of 23 sexual assault patients believe their



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kit will be sent to the lab, and all 23 victim-patients *want* their kits sent to the lab. This includes the 10 victims who chose to have the kit recorded as 'anonymous.' Only 13 victims have reported to law enforcement out of this group; however, the survey indicates that 'if evidence is found' that number jumps to 20 out of this group who would report. As a prosecutor, I want to see increased reports to law enforcement, and a clearer process on these cases.

We do have:

*\$50,000 from the STOP grant pilot to fund a tracking system. (I can tell you more about these web-based systems at a later time. There are no costs to hospitals or LE agencies.)

*A form already developed and in use for a preliminary inventory.

*Cumberland County's upcoming application for additional federal funds to supplement the STOP grant funds.

We are only asking one thing from the state: **funding for one position at the Crime Lab.**

1. This scientist would have the necessary technical understanding of evidence collection and testing to communicate effectively and train all partners.
2. Scientific knowledge will be necessary to address issues that may arise during implementation and related to processing and documentation.
3. Lastly, and importantly, funding this scientist position will allow additional casework to be completed as related to incoming kits. We should expect to see these numbers increase as we track kits and improve related training.

This is an efficient way to maximize limited state funds and prioritize this crucial public safety work into only one additional position requiring state funding.

Thank you to Rep. Geiger and the co-sponsors of this bill (including my representative,



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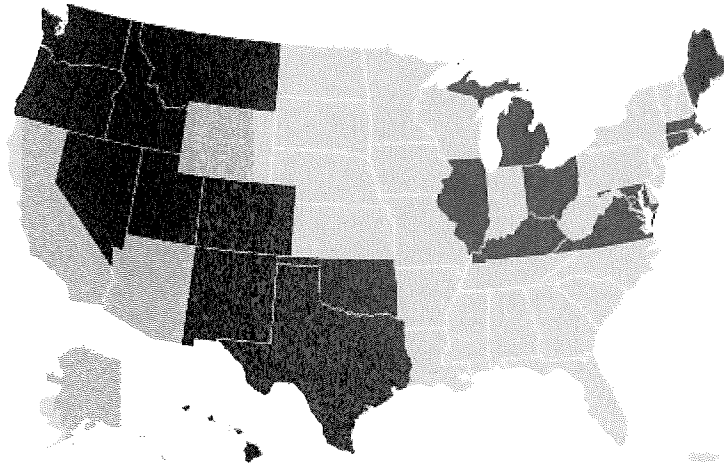
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Dan Ankeles), for recognizing this public health and public safety emergency and for putting this bill forward in this session, and to both committees for your work on these issues. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Explore the Backlog

REFORM STATUS FILED COURT OFFERED KEYS



● Full Reform ● Some Reform ● No Reform