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February 17, 2015

H.B. 6498

“An Act Concerning the Timely Transfer and Processing of Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits”

Senator Larson, Representative Dargan, Senator Guglielmo, and Representative Zupkus, thank you for considering HB 6498: *“An Act Concerning the Timely Transfer and Processing of Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits.”*

For the record, I am State Representative Roberta Willis, representing the 64th District.

My thanks to the Public Safety Committee for your consideration of HB 6498: *“An Act Concerning the Timely Transfer and Processing of Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kits”*, if passed, it which would ensure the timely transfer and processing of evidence in sexual assault investigations. Connecticut must establish clear timelines for sexual assault exam kits to be transferred to the state’s crime lab, and for analyzing and reporting of kits. We know that effective collection of evidence is of utmost importance to successfully prosecuting sex offenders.

HB 6498 seeks to establish specific guidelines for the transfer of sexual assault exam kits by the police to the state’s crime lab, as well as timeframes for the transfer to the lab from the hospital and for the analysis and reporting of the kit evidence at the lab. If a victim of sexual assault undergoes a forensic exam kit, an invasive 13 step process that takes anywhere from 4-8 hours, and reports to police, the kit should be tested and reported.

Unfortunately, our current statute 19a-112a is silent on timing. We need to ensure that when an police officer picks up a kit from a hospital, that they know that it should be taken to the lab.

Guidelines have been unclear for police on when, or whether or not, to bring the kit to the lab. Sexual assault victims have reported that their kits have been held at police stations.

This bill would allow for a 10 day turnaround and respects that there are departments that are short staffed and perhaps located a distance from the crime lab in Meriden.

Connecticut has always been a leader at passing policies to protect victims of sexual assault. Establishing a timeline would have CT join other states, who seek to lay out clear expectations for the transfer and processing of kits. In Illinois, they require 10 days, Texas (30 days), and Colorado (21) have all passed laws recently to clarify the expectations regarding the transfer of kits.

It is in the state's best interest to identify sex offenders and ensure that kits are analyzed and tested for DNA. While our crime lab processes kits in a timely fashion and does not currently have a rape kit backlog, as has been found in other states, Connecticut should nonetheless adopt a specific timeline for the kits to be tested once they arrive at the lab. This bill proposes 60 days. Doing so will set clear expectations for rape victims that the evidence that was painstakingly collected will be analyzed with urgency.

Testing kits can lead to a greater chance of prosecution, establish prior convictions, link cases based on evidence- in other words, hold offenders accountable and provide justice for victims

Too often we hear statistics about the number of victims who don't report to the police, but those who do report, deserve better, and our best to treat and analyze their evidence.

I would like to thank the Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. (CONNSACS) for bringing this issue to my attention, and I think it is important that we address this administrative shortcoming and public safety issue that warrants are prompt attention.

Thank you again for your consideration of this needed proposal.