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PRESS RELEASE

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Office of the Attorney General and Maryland Governor's Office of Crime Prevention and Policy Announce Launch of Statewide Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Tracking Program

BALTIMORE, MD (June 20, 2024) – Governor Wes Moore and Attorney General Anthony Brown, in partnership with the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK) Policy and Funding Committee and the Governors' Office of Crime Prevention and Policy (GOCPP), are proud to announce the launch of a statewide tracking system for Sexual Assault Evidence Kits (SAEKs).

“When survivors can count on accountability in our justice system, we have a better chance of gathering evidence and closing cases,” **said Governor Moore**. “By launching this new online system, we continue our commitment to making Maryland safer by building a culture of teamwork, transparency, and trust. I thank Attorney General Brown for his leadership, and I am grateful for all of the lawmakers, advocates, activists, and members of law enforcement who helped us get this over the finish line.”

“The tracking program is going to give survivors the transparency, accountability, dignity, and support that they deserve. It will help law enforcement and prosecutors find the perpetrators and hold them accountable,” **said Attorney General Brown**. “Survivors of sexual assault will no longer be kept in the dark after forensic evidence is collected. We must empower survivors and give them all they need to begin healing. This tracking system has the potential to do just that.”

Trained Forensic Nurse Examiners use SAEKs to collect forensic evidence in a medical setting for victims of sexual assault. The purpose of the examination, commonly known as a SAFE exam, is to collect evidence to help to identify or confirm the offender and to preserve the evidence in a way that can be used in a court of law. In most cases, the offender's DNA can be entered into CODIS, a national computer software program containing suspect DNA profiles. In the past, survivors had no ability to track their evidence kits. Without that critical knowledge and access, survivors felt often powerless.

“I never heard anything about my case for years after I was sexually assaulted at gunpoint in 1998 by a stranger, despite desperately trying to find out where my kit was in the process,” **explained survivor Angela Wharton of Baltimore.** “Two decades later, I learned my test kit had been thrown away only two years after I was viciously attacked. This new tracking system represents a ray of hope for survivors like me who have endured the anguish of having their trauma dismissed and their pursuit of justice thwarted by a system that failed to protect and serve.”

The tracking program, called “Track Kit™”, is designed by InVita Healthcare Technologies to follow the SAEK from collection to reporting and provide transparency for survivors of sexual assault. The program will allow survivors of sexual assault to monitor the location and testing status of their individual kit, providing contact information for each entity handling the SAEK along the chain of custody. It also provides Maryland with a means to verify each kit is tested in compliance with the law and provides users of the system region-specific resources for sexual assault survivors.

“The creation of the tracking system will help prevent future backlogs and hold government accountable so survivors can seek justice and sex offenders are prosecuted,” **said Lisae Jordan, Executive Director and Counsel for the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA).**

The Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee, with assistance from GOCPP and the OAG, applied for and received funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to procure a sexual assault kit tracking system. In 2023, Senate Bill 615/House Bill 759, “Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth, and Victim Services – Sexual Assault Evidence Collection Kit Reporting Program,” mandated that a statewide tracking system program. Track-Kit™ was chosen by a team of individuals from the Committee, GOCPP, and the OAG because it met the requirements of both the grant and the bill Governor Moore signed into law.

“For too long sexual assault survivors have been failed by the criminal justice system,” **said Maryland Senator Shelly Hettleman.** “The new tracking system will be the light survivors can use to make the system more transparent, to rebuild trust, and to enable them to seek justice and peace.”

The system is made accessible to survivors through a barcode number and password provided at the time the survivor completes a SAFE exam at the hospital. Stakeholders will scan the barcode, which is affixed to the outside of the kit, upon receipt by the agency. This will allow the survivor to see the progress of the kit as it moves from the hospital to law enforcement and, if appropriate, to the lab for testing and back to the appropriate agency. Survivors may access the status of their kit 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through the online tracking system.

Stakeholders that will be using the program include medical facilities, law enforcement, laboratories, and prosecutors’ offices. In Maryland, there are more than 150 agencies that will be using the system to track the kits and provide up-to-date information for survivors.

“This tracking system is a giant step forward in our criminal justice process. Survivors of sexual assault will have 24/7 access and knowledge about the status and location of this most critical evidence,” **explained Baltimore County State’s Attorney Scott Shellenberger.** “The tracking system will hold law enforcement and local State’s Attorneys accountable and punctuates our responsibility to always keep survivors informed.”

Maryland law also provides that all historic kits be entered into the tracking system on or before December 31, 2025. This move by the legislature combined with our state's mandated 75-year retention of SAEK kits means survivors in Maryland have more protections in place for securing their evidence than ever before.

The system policy center will be located in the GOCPP but will use data gathered from its partner agencies to provide accurate reporting on the status of SAEKs in Maryland.

For more information regarding the Track-Kit™ system, please visit <https://goccp.maryland.gov/victim-services/>.

Sexual assault survivors who have questions about sexual assault evidence kits, crime victim rights, or the tracking system, can reach out to MCASA's Sexual Assault Kit Initiative at 1-833-364-0046 or by emailing notification@mcasa.org to speak with a free and confidential advocate.

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