

News Release - Final Backlogged Sexual Assault Kit has been Tested; "A major step in building trust among sexual assault survivors"

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For Immediate Release: 12/29/21 10:00 A.M.

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Final Backlogged Sexual Assault Kit has been Tested

"A major step in building trust among sexual assault survivors"

Idaho State Police Forensic Services (ISPFS) announces a major milestone in the five-year effort to test all sexual assault evidence kits in Idaho. The last previously untested sexual assault kit in Idaho identified as needing and eligible for testing during a 2016 audit has been completed.

The final test means all kits identified in the 2016 audit as needing to be submitted to the lab, or already in the lab at that point, have now been completed, with reports provided to investigators and prosecutors, and any hits in the National DNA Index System (CODIS) provided to local law enforcement for further follow-up.

"This is a major step in building trust among sexual assault survivors, for assisting law enforcement, and providing critical information to policymakers," said Matthew Gamette, Laboratory System Director of Idaho State Police Forensic Services. "Overall, the completion of these previously unsubmitted kits in Idaho is part of a bigger initiative to keep Idaho communities safe and combat the crime of sexual assault."

Idaho leads the nation in addressing this important issue, said Gamette. ISPFS is leading the statewide multidisciplinary team that's addressing culture change as it relates to investigation, prosecution, and treatment of sexual assault survivors. Idaho has passed aggressive laws to test and retain evidence kits, implemented the first fully functional statewide sexual assault kit tracking system, and worked to ensure survivors of this crime are cared for. Using grant funding, ISPFS is working to ensure local communities have a coordinated effort, including specially trained nurses to combat sexual assault and assist survivors. ISPFS is training medical providers in every Idaho community to better engage

with and assist sexual assault survivors and helping coordinate local multidisciplinary teams intended to provide a comprehensive sexual assault response for the needs of both survivors and Idaho's criminal justice system.

Five Year Undertaking

"Our management and scientific staff recognized the critical importance of this work and put in exceptional effort to complete this project. I am proud of their accomplishment and what it means for solving and prosecuting crime in Idaho," said Colonel Kedrick Wills of the Idaho State Police.

ISPFS staff processed the majority of these kits in Idaho at the Meridian laboratory facility and worked diligently on this project while continuing to process current sexual assault cases and other DNA cases submitted. ISPFS accomplished this important work while receiving a huge increase in DNA cases into the lab, at some points between 2016 and 2021, an increase of more than 365%.

"ISP is extremely grateful to our amazing biology/DNA scientists for their dedicated and diligent efforts to address these crimes in Idaho. ISPFS performed a complete and comprehensive analysis of every kit and every swab was analyzed to ensure that all measures were taken, or could be taken, to address these crimes in Idaho. This project was a remarkable undertaking by the laboratory." Said Gamette.

ISPFS appreciates the FBI laboratory for their help processing some of the kits under a collaborative agreement. No kits were outsourced to private laboratories. All CODIS entries for cases worked in Idaho were made by ISPFS, which accounted for a significant amount of work by ISPFS staff.

About Sexual Assault Kit Tracking

The kits are a collection of physical evidence, including DNA samples, taken from sexual assault victims. Evidence collected can identify suspects or exonerate those wrongfully accused.

Prior to 2016, Idaho, like other states, had no statewide requirement on whether a sexual assault kit, once collected, had to be sent to a lab for processing. Nor was there any system to track the kits. However, following action by the Idaho Legislature in 2016, efforts have been underway to track and process all eligible kits and provide regular reports to the legislature and law enforcement.

As of this month, every evidence kit currently in existence in Idaho has now been entered into the kit tracking software developed in-house by ISP IT experts. This software, because of its exceptional efficiency, has been offered at no cost and is now in use by a number of agencies as others look to follow Idaho's lead and improve their evidence tracking system for the crime of sexual assault.

Public Reporting

The Idaho sexual assault kit data is available in real-time on the public ISP website for public transparency and survivor information. Every kit collected in Idaho and any kit existing in the state of Idaho is accounted for in this system. ISPFS provides monthly and annual reports to the Idaho legislature regarding the status of sexual assault kit tracking and processing in Idaho. ISPFS now has a full-time sexual assault kit tracking system coordinator to work with

medical facilities, law enforcement agencies, and prosecutors to ensure the information in the kit tracking system is accurate.

Grant Funding and Appreciation

ISPFS expresses appreciation to our collaborators at the Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, and Bureau of Justice Assistance for the DNA Capacity Enhancement and Backlog Reduction grant. This funding has allowed ISPFS to hire additional staff to address the previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits. These staff will now transition from this project to helping the laboratory improve turnaround time on current cases, including violent crime and property crimes that impact the safety, lives, property, and constitutional rights of people in Idaho. It's a strategic goal for ISPFS to work all DNA cases in the state of Idaho in under 30 days.

"These grants will make a huge difference in the state of Idaho. The Idaho State Police and the people of ISP Forensic Services are proud to lead the initiative to provide care and work toward justice for sexual assault survivors." Said Gamette.