

Amanda Price
Commissioner

www.DPS.Alaska.Gov



Department of
Public Safety

Anchorage, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

CDVSA and Department of Law warn against use of at-home sexual assault exam kits

September 30, 2019 (Anchorage, AK) – The Council on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (CDVSA) and Alaska Department of Law expressed concerns today over the concept of at-home sexual assault exam kits to be used without medical professionals. The use of such kits could actually end up hurting victims in the long-run and result in fewer successful prosecutions of sexual assault, not more.

“The gold standard for victim-centered investigations in sexual assault cases is the use of a multi-disciplinary team called a Sexual Assault Response Team. This allows the medical documentation of potential injuries, taking victim statements, and the gathering of forensic evidence all at the same time. This method minimizes re-traumatizing a victim by having them relive the assault over and over again for each of the steps in the investigation.” said L. Diane Casto, CDVSA’s executive director. “We need to make victims feel safe coming forward, having a medical expert conduct the examination, and connecting the victim to other important and needed assistance, such as a victim advocate. These at-home kits could mislead victims into thinking they have done all they need to do—that couldn’t be further from the truth.”

According to Deputy Attorney General John Skidmore, in prosecution of sexual assault cases, victim are often attacked by the defense. Placing victims in the chain of custody for DNA evidence will only expose victims to greater attacks and potentially compromise a prosecution. It is also important that injuries are documented by a medical professional as part of the examination, and that the victim’s statement is taken at the same time to avoid traumatizing the victim further.

“Trials are won and lost on the credibility and admissibility of the evidence you have,” said Deputy Attorney General Skidmore. “This is especially true in sexual assault cases when there may have been no other witnesses. If we want to bring perpetrators to justice and try to limit re-traumatizing the survivor, we want the first evidence that is gathered to be the best and most reliable way to build our case. A home kit will just make the prosecution more difficult and risk a lot of unwanted questions for the survivor, such as was the evidence really collected from the victim’s clothing, how exactly did that occur, what happened to it after it was collected? These are all extremely personal and difficult questions that are normally handled by a medical expert who completed the SART exam.”

“Our real concern here is that the providers of these at-home kits don’t understand what is actually needed to prosecute these cases,” said Attorney General Kevin G. Clarkson. “Their hearts may be in the right place, but in the end, it completely misses the mark. I would encourage victims to reach out to law enforcement and get the exam from a medical professional. And I would request the providers to stop marketing these kits. If they want to help, let’s work together to get victims the support and care they need.”

CONTACT: Deputy Attorney General John Skidmore at (907) 269-5100 or john.skidmore@alaska.gov.

###

Department Media Contact: L. Diane Casto, MPA, Executive Director CDVSA 907-465-5503
diane.casto@alaska.gov