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DPS PR# 18-47

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Report Highlights Major Progress Addressing Untested Sexual Assault Kits

Crime lab dedicates personnel exclusively to SAK testing; new website tracks progress

November 2, 2018 ANCHORAGE, Alaska – The Department of Public Safety today released its annual report to the Legislature on the status of testing sexual assault kits (SAKs) from across the state of Alaska. The report shows significant progress in addressing the backlog of unsubmitted, untested SAKs and highlights ongoing, long-term work at the state Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory to test kits – including the creation of a Sexual Assault Team (SAT) to prioritize those cases and increase output. DPS also unveiled a new website, dps.alaska.gov/saks, where progress on testing can be tracked through quarterly updates.

“Survivors of sexual assault deserve justice, and our ongoing efforts to test kits are a critical component in ensuring that victims receive that justice,” Commissioner Walt Monegan said. “DPS has made great strides to address the backlog of untested, unsubmitted SAKs; with the creation of the SAK website and SAT, we are doubling down on our commitment to secure justice for victims. They deserve no less.”

The annual report, required by HB 31, contains the inventory of previously unsubmitted, untested SAKs held by all 48 police departments in Alaska. In 2017, the inventory found 2,979 previously unsubmitted, untested victim kits; in 2018, that number is down to 2,568. The Crime Lab anticipates testing through all the kits will take 3-4 years due to the size of the inventory, limited number of qualified labs, and high demand for SAK analysis service. In addition, the Crime Lab’s Forensic Biology Unit has divided into a Major/Property Crimes Team and the SAT. The division will allow the Lab to prioritize sexual assault cases while still conducting DNA analysis on major crimes without delay.

The Crime Lab’s work on sexual assault kit testing is funded from two sources. Over the course of 2016 and 2017, DPS was the recipient of a \$1.5 million in federal Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grants that will conclude in 2020. That funding goes to support the testing and investigation of previously unsubmitted, untested kits from Alaska State Troopers (AST) cases. All 577 viable AST kits have been submitted for analysis; results have been received for 340, and the remaining results are expected to be received by March of 2019. Earlier this year, the Legislature allocated \$2.75 million in capital money to DPS to test kits from the other 47 police agencies across the state. In both cases, the Crime Lab is using

the funds to have the kits tested as quickly as possible by a private lab, with results returned back to Alaska for analysis and potential entry into CODIS.

“The Crime Lab’s progress on addressing sexual assault kits is remarkable, and I applaud the team here for working so diligently and deliberately to continue improving our outcomes,” Crime Lab Chief Orin Dym said. “As the efforts to address the previously unsubmitted, untested SAKs persist, I encourage Alaskans to [explore the new website](#), and return to it on a regular basis to learn more about our progress.”

Attached: Report to Legislature
Graph: previously unsubmitted SAKs by department
Frequently Asked Questions

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