



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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from the Illinois General Assembly

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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Legislation Seeks to Address Limited Options on Rape Kit Testing During COVID-19 Crisis

CHICAGO – Representative Kelly Cassidy and Senator Melinda Bush have passed emergency legislation to address concerns related to ensuring that survivors of sexual assault have access to care and evidence collection during the COVID-19 crisis. Under current law sexual assault survivors' only option for a forensic exam and evidence collection is to go to an emergency department. Many survivors seeking treatment at alternative sites have expressed fear of being exposed to COVID-19 at hospital emergency rooms.

Senate Bill 557 seeks to allow approved federally qualified health centers (FQHC) to perform rape kit examinations and collection during public health emergencies such as COVID-19.

"We know sexual assaults are not stopping during this time. Survivors should not have the added worry of being exposed to the virus, they deserve better" Representative Cassidy, D-Chicago.

Advocacy groups and experts in the industry know that sexual violence is not decreasing during this time. Resilience, Chicago's largest comprehensive rape crisis center has reported a 49% decrease in call volume from hospitals since the start of the pandemic. Meanwhile Howard Brown Health Center a federally qualified health center, has seen its volume of sexual assault cases double.

"Currently, the only place a survivor of sexual assault can get a rape kit or medical help is a hospital. With survivors citing COVID-19 and the health risk associated with going to a crowded hospital as a reason to stay away, it's more important than ever to allow federally qualified health centers to perform rape kits and give survivors additional options to seek help." Bush said. "The need for alternative options has never been more important than right now" Senator Melinda Bush, D-Grayslake.

In order to provide these exams FQHCs would need to apply to the Illinois Department of Public Health. Facilities must also abide by strict guidelines including working with emergency departments, rape crisis centers and offer wrap around services to survivors.

"With many survivors uncomfortable going to a hospital during the pandemic, it's critical to provide other places where they can access safe treatment and compassionate care," said Cook County State's Attorney Kimberly Foxx. "Expanding these options will also allow for evidence collection, which is vital to bringing survivors justice. I'm grateful to the sponsors and advocates who share our trauma-informed, victim-centered approach and moved quickly to advance this important legislation."

This legislation represents an initiative by the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, Chicago Coalition Against Sexual Exploitation, Illinois Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Office of the Attorney General and the Illinois Department of Public Health. The bill passed the House by a vote of 107-1 and the Senate 56-0.

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