



Rod Underhill, District Attorney
1021 SW Fourth Avenue, Room 600
Portland, OR 97204-1193
Phone: 503-988-3162 Fax: 503-988-3643
www.mcda.us

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National organization announces Oregon has implemented comprehensive sexual assault forensic evidence kit reform

Today, the Joyful Heart Foundation, a national organization working to end the backlog of untested sexual assault forensic evidence kits nationwide, announced that Oregon, Connecticut and Utah have become the latest states in the country to enact comprehensive sexual assault forensic evidence kit reform based on the organization's six pillars.

These kits are often called "SAFE kits."

The Joyful Heart Foundation's six pillars of comprehensive SAFE kit reform include: (1) Having annual statewide inventory of untested kits, (2) Having mandatory testing of backlogged kits, (3) Having mandatory testing of new kits, (4) Having a statewide tracking system, (5) Having victims' rights laws and (6) Having funding for reform.

Today's announcement from the Joyful Heart Foundation and data provided on its website means Oregon is now the second state – next to Connecticut – to have both completely eliminated its backlog of SAFE kits and to have successfully met all six pillars outlined by the [foundation](#).

"Eliminating Oregon's backlog and passing legislation to prevent another backlog from ever occurring required a unified effort and response from law enforcement and government. We are extremely proud of this recognition and we remain committed to providing the highest level of services and resources to survivors of sexual assault," said Multnomah County District Attorney Rod Underhill.

In 2015, DA Underhill, along with the Portland Police Bureau, Gresham Police Department, Multnomah County Sheriff's Office and the Oregon State Police Forensic Laboratory collaboratively initiated a project to process thousands of untested SAFE kits in Multnomah, Marion and Lane counties.

DA Underhill and others quickly identified funding from the New York County District Attorney's Office (DANY) and worked collectively with the Portland Police Bureau's Sex Crimes Unit after the City of Portland received a grant from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance's (BJA) Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Grant Program.

DANY awarded the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office a total of \$1,995,453 in September 2015. Using those funds, a coordinated effort, which involved local law enforcement and the Oregon State Police, was launched to send SAFE kits, dated 2014 or older from Multnomah, Lane and Marion counties, to a private lab in Utah for testing.

Under the DANY grant, nearly 3,000 SAFE kits from around the state of Oregon were tested.

In 2018, Oregon became one of the first five states in the country to clear its backlog of SAFE kits.

Senate Bill 1571, known as "[Melissa's Law](#)," helps satisfy two of the Joyful Heart Foundation's pillars. Melissa's Law was the Oregon Legislature's response to ensuring all SAFE kits, except for anonymous kits, are sent to the Oregon State Crime Laboratory for timely testing. Oregon Senator Sara Gelser was instrumental in this effort. The Oregon District Attorneys Association also provided critical assistance during the 2016 legislative session.

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The Portland Police Bureau's Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Workgroup, which was created in 2015, is comprised of victim-centered and trauma-informed members of the Portland Police Bureau and the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office.

"Behind every kit is a person—a sexual assault survivor—waiting for justice," said Ilse Knecht, Director of Policy & Advocacy for Joyful Heart. "The rape kit backlog represents a failure of the criminal justice system to protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. We can and must do better. When jurisdictions test every kit, they solve crimes, bring answers and a path to justice for survivors, take criminals off the streets, and exonerate the innocent."

A copy of the Joyful Heart Foundation's press release can be obtained by clicking [here](#).

On March 12, 2019, [Manhattan District Attorney Cy Vance, Jr.](#), announced the results from his office's \$38 million initiative to test SAFE kits in states across the country, including Oregon.

As stated earlier, one of the pillars for the Joyful Heart Foundation includes having a SAFE kit tracking system. In 2018, Oregon enacted a law that requires the creation and implementation of an electronic, statewide tracking system of SAFE kits.

This summer, the Portland Police Bureau launched the Sexual Assault Management System (SAMS) Victim Portal, which is an online portal where survivors of sexual assault can track the progress and status of their SAFE kit. The SAMS Victim Portal, developed in 2018 by the Portland Police Bureau's IT Department in collaboration with its Sex Crimes Unit, was made possible and funded by the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative grant.

The SAMS Victim Portal is currently in the process of being implemented statewide. Completion is expected by July 31, 2020.

The Multnomah County Untested Sexual Assault Kit Unit is comprised of a deputy district attorney, a forensic consultant and a victim advocate. The USAK Unit reviews every case arising from a previously untested SAFE kit, evaluates whether the case can be reopened for further investigation, and handles any resulting prosecution.

Currently, Multnomah County DDA Tara Gardner is assigned as the Untested Sexual Assault Kit deputy district attorney. Julie Jacobs is the assigned victim advocate and Susan Hormann is the assigned forensic consultant.

The Multnomah County District Attorney's Office would also like to acknowledge the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners for their continued support of the Untested Sexual Assault Kit Unit.

Recently, the Multnomah County District Attorney's Office produced a [video](#) for members of our community to inform them about at-home sexual assault forensic evidence collection kits. That video can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

Current Multnomah County SAFE kit criminal cases (as of October 10, 2019)

- State of Oregon vs Jihad Eldeen Moore - 18CR13996 – Convicted Oct. 31, 2018
- State of Oregon vs Chanh Van Tran - 18CR25167 - Convicted in November 2018
- State of Oregon vs Curtis Clint Williams - 17CR37474 - Convicted in June 2018
- State of Oregon vs Steven Guy Tubbs - 17CR08640 - Convicted in August 2018
- State of Oregon vs Jose Oscar Rosales - 17CR29317 - Convicted in February 2018
- State of Oregon vs Ricky Alexander Harrison - 18CR59141 - Pending arraignment
- State of Oregon vs Richard Timothy Ward – 19CR25495 - Pending arraignment
- State of Oregon vs Jesse Ryan Moser – 19CR53575 – Pending trial
- State of Oregon vs Donnie Michael Willis Jr. – 19CR55777 – Pending trial
- State of Oregon vs Leslie L. Thornton – 11-11-34868 – Pending trial

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Contact: Brent Weisberg, Communications Director
Multnomah County District Attorney's Office
Phone: 503.988.6567 | Email: Brent.Weisberg@mcda.us