

AG Schimel: Holds Statewide Sexual Assault Response team meeting

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MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Brad Schimel today convened his Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) and appointed a new co-chair and 16 new members. The Attorney General’s SART is comprised of a multidisciplinary group of professionals knowledgeable in the complex issues surrounding sexual assault.

“As more and more brave men and women come forward to share their traumatizing experiences of sexual assault, I want survivors to know that health care providers, law enforcement, prosecutors, and victims’ services in Wisconsin are working to provide the best care and support possible to survivors,” said Attorney General Schimel. “As a former sensitive crimes prosecutor, I knew when I was elected attorney general that there was more our state could do to create better outcomes for survivors. DOJ and the Sexual Assault Response Team have taken on a large effort to support survivors by improving system-wide response to sexual assault with a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach.”

The Attorney General’s SART meets multiple times per year and includes law enforcement, victim advocates, sexual assault nurse examiners (SANE), the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratory (WSCL), hospital administrators, policy makers, and prosecutors. Under the attorney general’s direction, the team evaluates the state’s response to sexual assault at the local, county, and state level, and makes recommendations and reforms to improve the system response to sexual assault.

At the SART meeting on Tuesday, August 21, Attorney General Schimel and task force members discussed changes to sexual assault nurse examiner training, the Wisconsin Sexual Assault Kit Initiative, and the [By Your Side](#) survivor outreach efforts.

Attorney General Schimel also appointed Captain Aimee Obregon, Commander of the Milwaukee Police Department Sensitive Crimes Division, to co-chair the SART alongside DOJ Office of Crime Victim Services Director Michelle Viste. Captain Obregon joined Milwaukee Police Department in 1992. After rising in rank at the department, Obregon was promoted to captain and served as Deputy Director of the Milwaukee Police Academy in 2013. Obregon has been a critical partner in processing Milwaukee's previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits under the Wisconsin Sexual Assault Kit Initiative.

The following individuals also were appointed to the SART:

- Kelly Andrichik, UW-Parkside Police Department
- Nathan Cihlar, Wausau Police Department
- Deb Donovan, Froedtert Hospital
- Deanna Grundl, Aurora Health Care
- Kim Hardtke, Brown County District Attorney's Office
- Crystal Jensen, Eau Claire County District Attorney's Office
- Julie Johnson, Madison Police Department
- Maggie Kunisch, Waukesha County District Attorney's Office
- Andi Manzer, Memorial Medical Center
- Chai Moua, CAP Services
- Corey Norlander, Sheboygan County Sheriff's Office
- Ingrid Peterson, UW-La Crosse
- Rick Spoentgen, Sauk County District Attorney's Office
- Carmin Valerdi, UNIDOS
- Michelle Viste, DOJ Office of Crime Victim Services
- Dena Williams, Reach Counseling

Continuing SART members are:

- Ian Henderson, Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- Pennie Meyers, Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- Laura Kollatz, Aurora Healing and Advocacy Services Forensic Nursing Program

In 2017, Attorney General Schimel selected five counties - Bayfield, Dane, La Crosse (campus community), Sheboygan, and St. Croix - to serve as pilot sites to strengthen and enhance their own SART teams. These counties have received specialized training on the multidisciplinary response to sexual assault, information on best practice policies and protocols for SART teams; and will be exploring ways

to utilize data collection and case reviews to continually measure and evaluate their SART response.

Throughout this process, pilot sites will also assist in developing best practice tools and training modules for the rest of the state. This will include updating the statewide Sexual Assault Response Team Protocol as well as the Wisconsin Prosecutor's Sexual Assault Reference Book.

New Protocol for Sexual Assault Forensic Exams

In 2016, under the attorney general's leadership, the SART established a [new protocol](#) for when a survivor presents for a sexual assault exam. The new protocol allows a patient/survivor the option to have a forensic exam conducted, regardless of whether or not they wanted to report the assault to law enforcement.

Under this new protocol, if a patient/survivor has a forensic exam conducted but does not want to report the incident to law enforcement, the collected kit will be sent directly to the WSCL for storage. The WSCL will hold the kit for up to 10 years, which is the current statute of limitations on second and third degree sexual assaults in Wisconsin. The patient/survivor is also provided information about their reporting options, advocacy resources, and contact information should they choose to report to law enforcement at a later date. If at any point in those 10 years the survivor wants to report the assault to law enforcement, the law enforcement agency can request that the kit be tested.

Since this new protocol was established in January 2016, 721 sexual assault kits have been collected from survivors who choose not to report the assault to law enforcement at the time of the forensic exam. In approximately 7% of these cases, survivors reported the alleged assault to law enforcement at a later date and directed that their kit be tested.

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Training Program

One of Attorney General Schimel's top priorities when he was elected was to make Wisconsin's sexual assault nurse examiner training program more robust. In May 2015, Attorney General Schimel hired a SANE coordinator to strengthen the state's only in-person SANE nurse training program and increased required training hours from 40 hours to 46 hours, including training in victim responses, crisis intervention, collaboration with community agencies, and medicolegal specimen collection,

documentation, and photography. The SANE nurse training program has also been expanded to include modules on human trafficking, adverse childhood experiences, mock trial, and photo case studies. In collaboration with the DOJ Bureau of Training & Standards staff, the DOJ Victim Services Training Officer, the Wisconsin Chapter of the International Association of Forensic Nurses, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA), and medical facilities and training faculty, the SANE coordinator works to create SANE programs around the state and provide consistent training standards and information.

Since first implementing a training program for SANE nurses in 2014, DOJ has trained 198 nurses in adult sexual assault exams and 88 nurses in pediatric sexual assault exams. Prior to 2014, the cost to each nurse taking this training was more than \$600. Now, this training is offered by DOJ for only \$100.

Redesigned Sexual Assault Kits

In 2015, a group of SANE nurses and the WSCL collaborated to re-design a medical-forensic evidence collection process that would be comprehensive and consistent across the state of Wisconsin. This updated sexual assault kit featured a “head to toe” collection sequence that is more compatible with the head to toe physical exam, easing the stress of the exam on the survivor. The new kit also protects a survivor’s privacy by identifying the kit by a barcode, instead of by name.

Prior to these reforms made under Attorney General Schimel’s leadership, the cost of each kit for a law enforcement agency or a hospital cost nearly \$20 each. DOJ now provides these new kits to hospitals and law enforcement agencies free of charge so the cost of the kit is not incurred by the patient.

Campus Sexual Assault

Due to the increased occurrences of sexual assault occurring on college campuses, Attorney General Schimel has deployed resources specific to campus sexual assault.

On college campuses, alcohol is often present during a sexual assault, and the fear of consequences for drinking should never come in the way of a victim seeking help from law enforcement and/or being treated by medical professionals. In 2016, DOJ partnered with the state legislature to support the [sexual assault victim amnesty bill](#), which prevents law enforcement from issuing a citation to an underage victim

of sexual assault, or anyone who is present with the victim, when he or she seeks the assistance of emergency medical personnel. This law applies statewide, but these circumstances frequently occur on college campuses.

In 2017 DOJ hosted a training at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point about campus sexual assault. Local and campus professionals including city, county, and campus law enforcement, sexual assault nurse examiners, campus officials, victim advocates, and prosecutors gathered for a training about the complexities surrounding the investigation of campus sexual assault and the uniqueness of these types of cases. These experts discussed methods to partner to more effectively address campus sexual assault and protect victims and campus communities. Another campus sexual assault training is scheduled for UW-La Crosse this fall.

Training for Law Enforcement

Since at least 1991, the basic officer training academy in Wisconsin included training on the investigation of sexual assault. In 2002, the state mandated the training academy include 12 hours on sexual assault. During the last fiscal year, 442 students successfully completed this basic training and received the 12 hours of training on sexual assault. However, many criminal justice professionals seek additional sexual assault trainings offered by DOJ and other public safety organizations, such as the Wisconsin Coalition of Sexual Assault (WCASA).

Since 2015, DOJ has provided free training on sexual assault response throughout the state. These trainings – a two-day training on best practices for initial responders and a three-day training on advanced interviewing – are multidisciplinary, offered to law enforcement, victim advocates, prosecutors, SANE nurses, and other service providers. Attendees are trained on the neurobiology of trauma reactions, offender dynamics, evidence identification and preservation, and techniques for conducting trauma-informed interviews.

In 2017, training was made available to prosecutors in the state on how to present a victim of sexual assault in court, and a curriculum was developed to train instructors on child sex trafficking.

Improving Access to Data on Sex Offenses

In July 2018, DOJ launched new interactive data dashboards regarding criminal sex offenses with incident-level details, in order to improve transparency in criminal

justice data for citizens, policy-makers, and researchers. The interactive data dashboard on sex offenses is the first Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) dashboard developed offering incident-level detail. Users can view the number and rate of six different sex offenses reported by each law enforcement agency over the last 5 years. Additionally, incident-level details including weapons, locations, victim and offender demographics, and the relationships between victims and offenders is available per county, year, and type of sex offense. Previously, only aggregate-level information for rape offenses and arrests was available. View the sex offense data dashboard at <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/dles/bjia/ucr-sex-offense-data>.

Wisconsin's Sexual Assault Kit Initiative

Wisconsin's Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (WiSAKI) is a statewide effort to address the accumulation of previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits in the possession of local law enforcement agencies and hospitals. In September 2015, DOJ was awarded two, \$2 million grants to implement this effort. In order to continue the project, DOJ was awarded supplemental grants from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) in 2016 and 2017 that totaled an additional \$3.1 million. To date, DOJ has received [the most grant funding](#) in the nation from BJA for a sexual assault kit initiative.

As part of the statewide effort to address the accumulation of unsubmitted sexual assault kits, DOJ laid out the following plan:

- Create a team dedicated to WiSAKI to assist local jurisdictions with victim notification protocols, as well as with the investigation and prosecution of cases that may arise from the testing of unsubmitted sexual assault kits. The team is made up of one victim services specialist, two special agents, one assistant attorney general, and one research analyst.
- Complete an inventory of all unsubmitted sexual assault kits at the state's 557 law enforcement agencies and nearly 40 hospitals with sexual assault forensic exam programs.
- Test unsubmitted sexual assault kits that have been designated for testing.
 - Out of the 6,852 kits inventoried, 4,157 kits are currently designated for testing. Of the kits designated for testing, testing is complete on 3,180 kits. Another 977 kits are in the testing process.
 - Testing on all sexual assault kits currently designated for testing will be completed by the end of 2018.
- Expand the sexual assault response training program to equip more law

enforcement officers, prosecutors, sexual assault nurse examiners, and victim advocates with the specialized knowledge and resources needed to properly respond to sexual assault cases.

- Implement a sexual assault kit tracking system that will track a kit from the point of manufacture, to hospitals, to law enforcement, and through submission to the state crime lab. This system is intended to offer an option for survivors to access information about the location of their kit and will provide a mechanism for the ongoing auditing of sexual assault kit submissions.

For more information about Attorney General Schimel's efforts to address the accumulation of previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits, and to see regular updates on testing results as they come in, go to www.wisaki.wi.doj.gov.

If you or someone you know has been affected by sexual assault, you're not alone. To find advocacy support services in your area, please contact the WI Coalition Against Sexual Assault at www.wcasa.org or 608-257-1516.