

Sen. Cowles: Celebrates passage of effort to support survivors

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MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after a bill he authored, 2021 Senate Bill 71, was passed by the Assembly on a voice vote during today's floor period:

“After several years of work with advocates and professionals in the field, I’m proud to see this important effort I’ve authored to create protocols and timelines for the collection and processing of sexual assault kits is now headed to its final step of the legislative process. Getting to this point has taken months of work in the drafting process with former Attorney General Brad Schimel, followed by myself testifying at three public hearings and passing the bill through the Senate without opposition in two consecutive legislative sessions.

“We’re still dealing with the ongoing ramifications of decades of backlogged sexual assault kit tests, including prosecutions that have come far too late. This includes cases local to Northeast Wisconsinites, such as a [New London man](#) – who was the first person convicted as a result of testing backlogged sexual assault kits – who assaulted a young woman in 2012 and wasn’t convicted until 2019. Thankfully, while justice was delayed, this serial sexual offender is now answering for his crime with 25 years in prison where he belongs.

[2021 Senate Bill 71](#) establishes timelines and protocols for nurses and members of law enforcement that will prevent a future backlog of sexual assault kits, ensure a proper chain of evidence, preserve these kits throughout the statute of limitations, and most importantly, provide assurances to survivors seeking justice. Senator Cowles’ bill is supported by groups representing law enforcement, survivor advocates, medical professionals, social workers, and more. Senate Bill 71 now heads to the Governor’s desk for his consideration.

“While the kit testing delay should not be forgotten, the progress that has been made has been tremendous. The cause of the sexual assault kit backlog was a bipartisan and multi-disciplinary failure, which is why I’m pleased to see that the legislation I’ve championed as author has become a bipartisan effort to provide a statutory solution to systematically prevent similar circumstances from ever happening again.”

“Sexual assault historically has been a notoriously underreported crime. Providing clarity and certainty to survivors with evidence collected from a sexual assault may lead to more survivors seeking justice and more successful investigations and prosecutions. I urge the Governor to sign my legislation without delay.”