

# Sen. Cowles: Effort to support survivors finally becomes law

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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 signed into law today as 2021 Wisconsin Act 116:

*“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 signed into law. Getting to this point has taken months of work in the drafting process with former Attorney General Brad Schimel, followed by testifying at three public hearings and passing the bill through the Senate without opposition in two consecutive legislative sessions before passing the Assembly last month.*”

The sexual assault kit testing backlog, which had built up for decades across administrations from both parties, resulted in delayed or denied prosecutions for hundreds, if not thousands of survivors. While clearing the backlog, some prosecutions have been pursued, including a [New London man](#) who was the first convicted as a result of clearing the backlog and began serving 25 years in prison in 2019 for the assault of a young woman in 2012.

***“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’m pleased to see that the bipartisan legislation I’ve championed as author to provide a statutory solution to systematically prevent a testing backlog of sexual assault kits from ever happening again has now become law, and want to thank all those who helped make this possible.”***

While some prosecutions of sexual offenders have been taking place as the backlog is cleared, this new law will prevent late prosecutions as a result of delayed evidence testing in the future. [2021 Wisconsin Act 116](#) establishes timelines and protocols for nurses and members of law enforcement that will prevent a future testing backlog of sexual assault kits, ensure a proper chain of evidence, preserve kits throughout the statute of limitations, and most importantly, provide assurances to survivors seeking justice. Act 116 is supported by groups representing law enforcement, survivor advocates, medical professionals, social workers, and more.