

# Sen. Cowles: Applauds the implementation of the sexual assault kit testing and handling procedures law

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GREEN BAY- Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement on the effective date of [2021 Wisconsin Act 116](#), which was authored by Senator Cowles to create timelines and protocols for the testing and handling of sexual assault kits. Senator Cowles also authored a bill similar to Act 116 in the 2019-20 Legislative Session and has been working on this issue for more than five-years:

*“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 finally make the final step in the process with the implementation of this new 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 finally passing the Assembly, heading to the Governor, and getting implemented at the Department of Justice.*

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 the author to provide a statutory solution to systematically prevent a testing backlog of sexual assault kits from ever happening again has become law, and want to thank all those who helped make this possible.***

Act 116 will prevent late prosecutions as a result of delayed evidence testing by establishing timelines and protocols for nurses, members of law enforcement, and state crime lab staff which will ensure a proper chain of evidence, preserve kits throughout the statute of limitations, and provide assurances to survivors seeking justice. Under Act 116, once a kit that is collected by a healthcare professional and law enforcement is notified that day, it is possessed within 72 hours and submitted to the State Crime Lab within 14 days for processing. This legislation was supported by law enforcement, survivor advocates, medical professionals, social workers, and more.

*“Act 116 was also accompanied by [2021 Wisconsin Act 117](#), which Senator Darling and Representative Thiesfeldt also authored over the past two legislative sessions to establish a sexual assault kit tracking database known as Track-Kit. Together, these efforts provide greater accountability on the behalf of sexual assault survivors to ensure that evidence is handled property and justice can be sought.”*