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Senate Supports Survivors by Approving Sexual Assault Kit Bill

MADISON— Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after the state Senate passed 2021 Senate Bill 71 on a voice vote. The bill - introduced by Senators Cowles and Agard (D-Madison) and Representatives Steffen (R-Green Bay) and Macco (R-Ledgeview) - creates timelines and protocols for the collection and processing of sexual assault kits:

“We’re still dealing with the ongoing ramifications of decades of backlogged sexual assault kit tests, including through prosecutions that have come far too late. 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 was proud that the Senate took action today on a bipartisan basis to pass a statutory solution that will systematically prevent similar circumstances from ever happening again.

“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 certainty to sexual assault survivors seeking justice.

Additionally, this legislation provides an option to survivors to have evidence collected and preserved even if they wish to not press charges at that time to help give time to make their own choice. I believe Senate Bill 71 is a common-sense step that we owe to the survivors of sexual assault to ensure that evidence is handled properly so they can have one less thing on their mind as they deal with the trauma they endured.

“Sexual assault is an issue that impacts every corner of the state and historically has been a notoriously underreported crime. Providing clarity and certainty to survivors with evidence collected from an assault may lead to more survivors seeking justice and more successful investigations and prosecutions. I look forward to Assembly action on this important legislation.”

Today’s actions on 2021 Senate Bill 71 is bolstered by Senate’s passage of 2021 Senate Bill 94 - authored by Senator Darling (R-River Hills) and Representative Thiesfeldt (R-Fond du Lac) - which establishes a Wisconsin Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System to allow survivors, law enforcement officials, and health care professionals to access the status and track the location of a sexual assault kit. Both Senate Bill 71 and Senate Bill 94 now head to the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety.

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