

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1068

As Reported by House Committee On:
Public Safety

Title: An act relating to sexual assault examination kits.

Brief Description: Concerning sexual assault examination kits.

Sponsors: Representatives Orwall, Kagi, Appleton, Gregerson, Reykdal, Carlyle, Stanford, Sawyer, Fitzgibbon, Jinkins, Cody, Hudgins, Senn, Clibborn, Moeller, Riccelli, Moscoso, Farrell and Fey.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Public Safety: 1/14/15, 1/23/15 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires a law enforcement agency to submit a request for laboratory examination within 30 days of receiving a sexual assault examination kit, provided that the victim or the victim's legal guardian has consented to analysis of the kit as part of a sexual assault investigation.
- Specifies that failure to comply with the 30-day deadline does not create a private right of action against the law enforcement agency and is not a basis to exclude evidence in a court proceeding or to set aside a conviction or sentence.
- Creates a work group to study the issue of untested sexual assault examination kits in Washington, which must file an annual report through June 30, 2018.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 9 members: Representatives Goodman, Chair; Orwall, Vice Chair; Klippert, Ranking Minority Member; Hayes, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Appleton, Griffey, Moscoso, Pettigrew and Wilson.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Cassie Jones (786-7303).

Background:

After a person has been the victim of a sexual assault, the person may undergo a forensic examination for the purpose of collecting any evidence that may have been left behind during the assault. Biological evidence such as saliva, blood, or semen may be collected. The doctor or nurse conducting the examination preserves the evidence using a sexual assault examination kit, commonly referred to as a rape kit. The sexual assault examination kit contains tools that may be used by the doctor or nurse, such as swabs, combs, blood collection devices, and documentation forms. When the examination is complete, the evidence is packaged and steps are taken to preserve the chain of custody.

In some cases, custody of the sexual assault examination kit may be transferred to a law enforcement agency. When a law enforcement agency receives a sexual assault examination kit, the agency may submit it to a crime lab for analysis, but is under no specific deadline for submission.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

When a law enforcement agency receives a sexual assault examination kit, and consent has been given for the rape kit to be analyzed as part of a sexual assault investigation, the agency must submit a request for laboratory analysis to the Washington State Patrol Crime Laboratory within 30 days of receiving it. The failure of a law enforcement agency to meet the 30-day deadline is not a basis to exclude the evidence from a court proceeding or to overturn a conviction or sentence, and it does not create a private right of action against the agency.

A work group is created to study the issue of untested sexual assault examination kits in Washington. The President of the Senate will appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses in the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives will appoint one member from each of the two largest caucuses of the House of Representatives. In addition, the work group will consist of one member from each of the following groups:

- the Washington State Patrol;
- the Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs;
- the Washington Association of Prosecuting Attorneys;
- the Washington Defender Association or the Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers;
- the Washington Association of Cities;
- the Washington Association of County Officials;
- the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs;
- the Office of Crime Victims Advocacy;
- the Washington State Hospital Association;
- the Innocence Project Northwest;
- the Washington Forensic Investigations Council;
- institutions of higher education; and

- one or more individuals who are survivors of sexual assault.

The work group will research the number of untested sexual assault kits in Washington, the reasons why they are untested, and where they are stored. The work group will also review and make recommendations regarding policy options for reducing the number of untested kits, the procedure for contact and notification to victims, and the collaboration among medical, legal, and victim advocacy systems in providing services to victims. The work group will also research funding sources for the testing of sexual assault examination kits.

The work group will meet at least twice annually and provide an annual report on its findings and recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor. The work group expires on June 30, 2018.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill requires a law enforcement agency to submit a request for crime laboratory examination within 30 days of receiving a sexual assault examination kit, provided that the victim or the victim's legal guardian has consented to analysis of the kit as part of a sexual assault investigation.

It clarifies the duties of the work group with respect to untested sexual assault examination kits and requests for laboratory examination and adds the duty to research and make recommendations for securing non-state funding for testing sexual assault examination kits.

It adds members to the work group and clarifies the meeting and reporting requirements of the work group.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill came about after a tour of evidence rooms and conversations with families of rape victims. Rape is a common occurrence in some women's lives. This bill is to start the conversation about seeking justice for victims and helping them find their voices. Testing rape kits is part of this. Currently, there is no way to know how many rape kits are untested. This bill is also about keeping children and women safe. Testing all rape kits will lead to establishing a pattern by offenders. The bill gives tools to law enforcement to build cases. In Michigan, a 10 percent sample of testing rape kits revealed 198 serial rapists. This is a chance to work collaboratively on behalf of victims.

There may be as many as 400,000 untested rape kits in the nation. Ohio recently codified a requirement to submit rape kits; the law applied retroactively. A number of states are doing this. This bill is a conservative approach. All rape kits in Ohio were tested dating back to 1993. Results of the tests started coming back in 2013. New cases were filed as a result of the testing. Approximately 2,000 rape kits had a Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) hit to a known offender. This led to 244 indictments. Ohio is leading the field in this area. Thirty percent of those indicted are serial rapists. It has been very successful and great for the police department. The conviction rate for the indictments is 90 percent.

Reasons why rape kits were untested included the cost of the technology. This cost has dropped significantly. Another reason is the consent issue; kits were not tested if there was a consent defense. Serial rapists often commit both stranger rapes and acquaintance rapes. Testing is cost effective in the long run considering the result of an economic harm study. Police and victims will have better relations.

This bill is a necessary advancement to meet the needs of survivors. Rape kits sit on shelves and the victims do not get justice after going through an invasive four- to six-hour examination. The bill is a positive first step to streamline the process. Forwarding the rape kits will generate data on how many kits there are. The bill needs to specify that forwarding the rape kits requires victim consent. There is a difference between "Jane Doe Kits" and rape kits where there is full consent. This is not comprehensive reform but it is a step in the right direction. The policy should be survivor-centered and encourage reporting and prosecution. If there is a low likelihood of testing, there is little incentive to do the exam.

Rapists are recidivists. Rape kit evidence matters. It is a complicated issue because of the need to pay for all the testing. All states who have had comprehensive reform have started with a study group. The bill will stop the amassing of rape kits on the shelf.

(With concerns) There should be a mechanism for allowing law enforcement to not test the rape kits involving accused persons whose charges are dismissed. The Federal Bureau of Investigation is developing rapid DNA testing technology. This could lead to an ability to identify profiles in CODIS which are currently unidentifiable. This is a concern for those wrongly prosecuted.

(Other) There are concerns with resources based on how many rape kits the Washington State Patrol (WSP) will receive. Language surrounding accredited labs and database matches needs clarifications. The bill, as written, tests no kits. Rape kits would sit at the WSP being prioritized the same as they are now. There are 5,000-6,000 untested kits. The DNA will solve crime but the crime lab cannot process the current numbers. All this bill does is move rape kits from one shelf to another. The WSP needs significantly more funding.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Orwall, prime sponsor; Rick Bell, Ohio County Prosecuting Attorney's Office; Andrea Piper-Wentland, Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs; Nancy Sapiro, Legal Voice; Erika Teschke; and Lara Zarowsky, Innocence Project Northwest.

(With concerns) Amanda Lee, Washington Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and Washington Defender Association.

(Other) Mitch Barker, Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs; and Rob Huss, Washington State Patrol.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.