



Oregon
Secretary of State
Dennis Richardson

Seeking Justice for Victims of Sexual Assault

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Secretary of State
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Newsletter from Dennis

This newsletter provides regular updates and important information to citizens about their government. Our office strives to educate Oregonians about the current affairs that affect their lives, family and community.

Seeking Justice for Victims of Sexual Assault

One of the most devastating crimes is sexual assault. When a victim of rape comes forward and reports the assault, every effort should be made to fully investigate the crime, identify the perpetrator, and prosecute to the full extent of the law. Unfortunately, thousands of rape evidence kits (known as Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence [SAFE] Kits) have never been processed and have remained for years in Oregon's state and local law enforcement evidence closets.

In 2015, Oregon had almost 4,900 unprocessed SAFE Kits in various facilities across the state. To address this travesty of justice, the Oregon

Legislature took action in 2016 by passing Senate Bill 1571, known as Melissa's Law. Oregon's new state law requires law enforcement agencies to collect and test future SAFE Kits and report on the progress toward eliminating the current backlog. It also provides additional resources to Oregon State Police (OSP) to meet the new goals.

To determine the status of efforts to eliminate the backlog of SAFE Kits in Oregon, a Secretary of State audit team has completed a thorough evaluation. The audit report title summarizes the findings: "Forensic Division Has Taken Appropriate Steps to Address Oregon's Sexual Assault Kit Testing Backlog."

The audit looked into the progress and efficiency of removing the backlog as Melissa's Law did not provide specific direction on how the backlog should be prioritized.

The audit found that:

- OSP has complied with Melissa's Law by increasing lab capacity and reporting to legislators on efforts to reduce the SAFE Kit backlog.
- OSP is following best practices outlined by the National Institute of Justice for forensic labs that process SAFE Kits.

Victims of sexual assault deserve to have justice as soon as possible. I'm thankful to the Oregon State Police Forensic Services Division for their strong efforts and their promise to remove the entire SAFE Kit backlog by the end of 2018. In short, this audit provides assurance that OSP is on the right track, and I look forward to continuing to work with them to evaluate their progress.

Danielle Tudor, a rape survivor and activist who was a driving force behind the enactment of Melissa's Law, has tracked the testing progress of the SAFE Kit backlog as a member of both the Portland Police Bureau and Oregon Governor's task force. She was thrilled to learn that Oregon has taken the steps necessary to reduce the backlog of SAFE Kits and help get the DNA data of rapists on the national database to assist in bringing criminals to justice.

When informed about the audit, Danielle had this to say:

"I am very grateful that Secretary Richardson is a man of his word and

completed the audit in a timely manner as promised. Not only did his team complete the audit of unprocessed SAFE Kits, but he also took the time to visit labs across our state to gain an understanding of how the process of testing a SAFE Kit works.”

We congratulate the OSP forensics labs. To Oregon’s victims of sexual abuse and harassment, the audit shows a clear message...the Oregon Legislature, Oregon law enforcement agencies, and the Oregon Secretary of State stand with you.

In the wake of #metoo and revelations of multiple high-profile cases of sexual assault and harassment, a light is being shown on the injustices many face on a daily basis—especially individuals who do not have the power or ability to call out their abusers.

As a husband and as a father of eight daughters, I have a special concern for the risks women face in their everyday lives, and I will always advocate for a safe environment and justice for all Oregonians.



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