

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESHB 1109

As of March 14, 2021

Title: An act relating to supporting victims of sexual assault.

Brief Description: Concerning victims of sexual assault.

Sponsors: House Committee on Public Safety (originally sponsored by Representatives Orwall, Mosbrucker, Simmons, Goodman, Leavitt, Valdez, Kloba, Graham, Morgan, Caldier, Rule and Macri).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/25/21, 98-0.

Committee Activity: Law & Justice: 3/15/21.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Modifies the collection and reporting of the status of investigations for sexual assault cases.
- Requires the state to conduct a case review program for improving training and case outcomes.
- Expands the rights of sexual assault survivors.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON LAW & JUSTICE

Staff: Tim Ford (786-7423)

Background: Sexual Assault Kits. A victim of a sexual assault may undergo a forensic examination to collect evidence related to the assault. A health care practitioner conducts the examination, gathers, and preserves the evidence using a sexual assault kit (SAK). The evidence collected may include clothing fibers, hairs, saliva, blood, semen, and skin debris. After the examination, a law enforcement agency may take custody of the SAK for use during an investigation and subsequent criminal prosecution. The evidence may contain deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) for laboratory testing and may identify the perpetrator from

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DNA test results. In 2015, the state established mandatory SAK testing requirements. With few exceptions, a law enforcement agency is required to submit a SAK to the Washington State Patrol Crime Laboratory for testing within 30 days of receiving it if the victim consents to the testing.

Law Enforcement Training. The Criminal Justice Training Commission (CJTC) provides basic law enforcement training for new recruits, as well as advanced training and educational programming for certified law enforcement officers. In 2020 the Legislature required CJTC to develop a proposal for a case review program designed to improve outcomes in sexual assault investigations by improving training and investigation practices. The program must evaluate current training and practices to foster a trauma-informed, victim-centered approach to victim interviews and to identify best practices and current gaps in training. The program must include a comparison of cases involving investigators and interviewers who have participated in training, to cases involving investigators and interviewers who have not participated in training. The program must include randomly selected cases for a systematic review to assess whether current practices conform to national best practices to investigating sexual assault cases and interacting with survivors.

Rights of Sexual Assault Survivors. In addition to other rights provided by law, a survivor has the right to:

- a medical forensic examination at no cost;
- assistance from a sexual assault survivor's advocate during the medical examination and interviews with law enforcement investigators, prosecutors, or defense counsel, unless an advocate is not available and whether or not the survivor previously waived the right to an advocate's assistance;
- information upon request about the forensic analysis of their SAK and other physical evidence, and whether the testing yielded a DNA match, so long as the information does not compromise an ongoing investigation;
- notice before disposal or destruction of their SAK;
- a copy of the police report at no charge; and
- an opportunity to review their statement before law enforcement refers their case to the prosecutor.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Bill (Proposed Striking Amendment): The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs (WASPC), in consultation with the attorney general, must collect information on the status of any investigation of a sexual assault case where a law enforcement agency possessing a SAK has not requested a forensic examination by the Washington State Patrol Crime Laboratory as of July 24, 2015. The status of the investigation includes:

- the case number;
- the date the SAK was submitted to the crime lab with a request for a forensic examination;

- the date the exam was completed and reported to the law enforcement agency;
- if the case is open or closed; and
- the reasons for why a case may be closed.

On a semiannual basis, WASPC must work with law enforcement agencies to update the status of any investigation for open cases, and make reports to the Governor and Legislature.

If any SAK analysis results in a DNA hit, the attorney general may request information on the case status from the law enforcement agency and prosecuting attorney, who must provide the requested information. The attorney general must consult with WASPC when developing procedures for requesting and collecting information on status updates.

The 2020 legislative requirement for CJTC to develop a proposal for a case review program is made into a permanent program. The program must review case files from law enforcement agencies and prosecuting attorneys to identify changes to training and investigation practices necessary to optimize outcomes in sexual assault investigations and prosecutions involving adult victims. The program must include an analysis of the impact race and ethnicity have on sexual assault case outcomes. The program may review files of closed cases involving allegations of adult sexual assault only. Any law enforcement agency or prosecuting attorney selected for the program must make requested case files and other documents available to CJTC, provided the case files are not linked to ongoing, open investigations. Program participants must include available information on the race and ethnicity of all sexual assault victims.

The rights of sexual assault survivors are expanded including:

- written notice of the right to receive a medical forensic examination at no cost;
- written notice of eligibility to receive other benefits under the crime victim compensation program;
- for an adult survivor to receive a referral to an accredited community program for services related to the sexual assault;
- for a minor survivor to receive a referral to services in accordance with county protocols;
- to consult with a survivor's advocate throughout the investigatory process and prosecution of the survivor's case and court proceedings;
- providing access for the survivor's access to medical facilities, law enforcement officers, prosecuting attorneys, defense attorneys, courts and other applicable criminal justice agencies, including correctional facilities;
- receipt of timely notifications from law enforcement and the prosecuting attorney as to the status of the investigation and any related prosecution of the survivor's case as well;
- access to interpreter services where necessary; and
- for a minor survivor to provide remote video testimony when appropriate, and safeguarding the minor's security when in the courtroom.

Other. An emergency clause is added so section 3 of the bill does not expire before the bill takes effect.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.