



PRESS RELEASE

Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy Committee Submits 2021 Annual Report

BALTIMORE, MD (January 4, 2021) – The Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK) Policy and Funding Committee has submitted its [2021 Annual Report](#). Despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee made substantial progress to further sexual assault response reform in Maryland. In 2020, the Committee successfully advocated in support of legislation that protects the privacy of victims and allows medical personnel to collect and be reimbursed for vital evidence that could impact the outcome of sexual assault cases. The Committee also played a crucial role in advancing legislation that protects a victim’s right to decide to limit or stop a sexual assault investigation or prosecution.

Additionally, the Committee continued to fulfill its obligations under the Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grant by conducting the unsubmitted kit inventory, starting to send kits for testing, finalizing the victim notification protocol, and engaging the Maryland Department of Information Technology (DoIT) to identify a tracking system platform. The committee received the \$2.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice in 2018 to conduct a statewide inventory; test a portion of the unsubmitted kits; establish a statewide tracking system; and provide victim services. Thus far, many law enforcement agencies have begun submitting kits for analysis in accordance with the testing order and protocol established by the Committee. The Committee will publish the results on its SAKI grant webpage, which should become active this month. The Committee worked with DoIT to establish all the necessary requirements for implementing Maryland’s tracking system and intends to select a system by the end of this month. The Committee worked with the Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault (MCASA) to develop a draft protocol to provide law enforcement and victim advocates guidance on how to conduct victim notification. The protocol has two layers: a survivor opt-in system, which allows victims to make the first contact through an information line or email support, and advocate-initiated notification, which covers notifications when the victim has not utilized the opt-in system.

The Committee also advanced its statutory mandates and initiatives by publishing guidance documents to assist law enforcement, assisting OAG in promulgating regulations to codify the Untested Kit Review, and aiding the Governor’s Office of Crime Prevention, Youth and Victim Services (GOCPYVS) in implementing the HIV nPEP Pilot Program. HIV nPEP is a form of medical intervention designed to prevent HIV infection after exposure to the virus. The medication must be started within 72 hours to maximize its effectiveness. Under the Pilot Program, a victim of sexual assault or child sexual abuse will be provided the full course of

nPEP treatment and follow-up care free of charge, if the medication is requested by the victim or prescribed by a healthcare provider. The Pilot Program went into effect on October 1, 2019, and is being administered by GOCPYVS.

In FY2021, the Committee will continue its efforts to advance the SAKI grant, keep law enforcement and sexual assault practitioners informed regarding SAEK policy changes and procedures, establish best practices to address drug-facilitated sexual assault, and promote compliance with recent SAEK reforms.

BACKGROUND: In 2017, the General Assembly passed legislation creating the Maryland Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Policy and Funding Committee. The Committee was established to create uniform, statewide policies regarding the collection, testing, and retention of medical forensic evidence in sexual assault cases and increase access to justice for sexual assault victims. The SAEK Committee must submit an annual “report on [its] activities during the prior fiscal year to the Governor and...the General Assembly.”

Previous SAEK Committee Annual Reports can be found [here](#).