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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Attorney General Kaul Celebrates Two Years of Statewide Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System

MADISON, Wis. – Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul today is celebrating two years of Wisconsin’s sexual assault kit (SAK) tracking system. Since its inception in May 2022, 3,458 SAKs have been entered into the SAK tracking system. This system provides sexual assault survivors with transparency regarding the status and location of their SAK, empowering those survivors who want access to that information.

“Wisconsin’s sexual assault kit tracking system ensures that survivors can access information about the status of their kit at any time,” said Attorney General Kaul. “Thank you to everyone who has helped make the kit-tracking system a success.”

“Survivors have a greater sense of control with the Track Kit system. It allows them to make decisions on their time and be assured they know where all their sensitive information is at all times,” said RCC Sexual Violence Resource Center Executive Director Dana Pellebon. “It also helps survivors really understand the process of evidence collection and tracking through the system. I am grateful to have a tool to give survivors a great sense of control over what happens to them and their information during any criminal legal process.”

“Since the implementation of Track Kit, it has been a useful tool for survivors. After making the tough decision to have evidence collected at the hospital it’s a sense of relief for survivors to have information on how to track where their evidence is. Following in the database to see where their kit is gives them a bit of comfort in the waiting for what is often a long criminal justice process. This sense of control is

incredibly important for survivors in their healing,” said Jessica Lind, Women’s Community Sexual Assault Victim Services Program Coordinator. “In addition, while Track Kit has been designed primarily for survivors to track their kit, it’s been a useful tool for our Marathon County SART. Law enforcement can track how many kits are being sent into the crime lab from our county including anonymous kits. This helps our team track trends in our community surrounding the number of people seeking medical attention and the number of reporting and non-reporting. It allows our team to analyze those numbers and determine what education is necessary for our community surrounding the importance of seeking medical attention after a sexual assault.”

Sexual assault is a significant concern in the state of Wisconsin. According to the Uniform Crime Reporting program, published by the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) Bureau of Justice Information and Analysis, there were 5,215 sex offenses reported to law enforcement in Wisconsin in 2022. Understanding that sexual assaults are underreported, it is likely that the actual number of sexual assaults committed in Wisconsin in 2022 is much higher.

Deciding to walk into a health care facility for an exam after a sexual assault, or to report a sexual assault to law enforcement and engage with the criminal justice system can be challenging for survivors. Navigating the criminal justice system can be confusing and intimidating for many survivors. Additionally, survivors may not trust the system response, or they may fear they will not be believed. While no one can guarantee the outcome of an investigation or prosecution, responding professionals must be diligent about treating every survivor with dignity and respect. Survivors must feel confident that, regardless of the outcome, they were heard, empowered, respected, and supported. Implementing the SAK tracking system is one way Wisconsin DOJ is taking a victim-centered approach when working with sexual assault survivors.

2021 Wisconsin Act 117 established statutes governing the tracking of sexual assault kits and requires health care professionals, law enforcement agencies, and the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratories to enter information about the status of a sexual assault kit into the Wisconsin SAK Tracking System. This allows survivors of sexual assault the ability to anonymously access information about the location and status of their sexual assault kit. Wisconsin DOJ previously created the Wisconsin SAK Tracking System in 2022 with Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) grants from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). However, Act 117 ensures that health care professionals, law enforcement agencies, and the Wisconsin State Laboratories enter information into the system.

All SAKs collected by a Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) are required to be tracked in the system. There are currently 374 SANE-trained health professionals using the system. The SAK tracking system operates on a bar code system, therefore no personally identifiable information from the victim is stored in the system. At the time of the SANE exam, if a survivor chooses to have evidence collected, education on the tracking system and a unique barcode will be given. Survivors can easily look up their SAK's location, ensuring that survivors can easily check to make sure their kit has been sent to the crime lab for testing and is not sitting forgotten and untested on evidence or hospital room shelves across the state.

Since 2015, BJA has awarded SAKI grants to Wisconsin DOJ to inventory previously unsubmitted SAKs, test those kits, assign designated personnel to pursue new investigative leads and prosecutions, and to support victims throughout the investigation and prosecution process. In addition, SAKI grant funding is being used to increase collection of offender DNA that may lead to the identification of serious and serial sex offenders.