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The Status of Sexual Assault Evidence Examination Kit Analysis in New Hampshire

The State of New Hampshire is actively working on two initiatives to address unsubmitted and backlogged sexual assault examination kits.

The first is an effort to locate and address any kits in law enforcement custody that have not been submitted to the New Hampshire State Police Forensic Laboratory (NHSPFL) for analysis. The New Hampshire Department of Justice (NH DOJ) secured Federal grant funding under the Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence – Inventory, Tracking and Reporting (SAFE-ITR) program to survey police departments statewide, identify kits that have not been previously submitted or fully tested, and work to get them submitted to the NHSPFL for analysis.

The NH DOJ has also been using the funding to initiate a kit tracking system so the status of kits can be tracked moving forward. Reports on the progress of the work under this grant can be found at: <https://www.doj.nh.gov/criminal/victim-assistance/publications.htm>. As a result of this initiative, the laboratory has received 593 kits for analysis starting in May 2020. The oldest kit received was from 1993.

Federal grant funding the NHSPFL has received under the DNA Capacity Enhancement for Backlog Reduction (CEBR) grant program was utilized to send the kits out to an external laboratory for DNA analysis. Moving forward, law enforcement is required to submit all sexual assault kits to the laboratory so any future New Hampshire backlogs of unsubmitted kits can be prevented.

The State's second initiative aims at ensuring that all submitted kits are tested fully in the NHSPFL in a timely manner. To achieve this, the New Hampshire Department of Safety requested funding under the American Rescue Plan Act to completely re-tool its workflow for DNA analysis. The introduction of more efficient instrumentation, automation, and new software capabilities will allow the laboratory to enhance and expand its DNA testing capabilities.

Due to the resources required to validate and implement this new workflow which is in the process of being put in place, all kits currently being submitted to the laboratory are temporarily being outsourced for analysis so they can be tested in a timely manner during this transition. Beginning in January 2023, the laboratory started sending kits to an external laboratory monthly. The initial batch of kits included any kit which was in-house but had not yet begun testing, so the NHSPFL effectively has no backlog of kits which are awaiting analysis at this time. The transition to this new workflow is expected to take approximately a year to accomplish.

Information on the number of sexual assaults which are reported in the State each year can be found at <https://crimestats.dos.nh.gov/>.



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