



March 1, 2023

House Committee on Public Safety Finance and Policy
Room 509, State Office Building, 100 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
St. Paul, MN 55155

Honorable Chair Moller and the Members of the Committee on Public Safety,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports House File 2034, which would ensure the swift testing of every rape kit, take dangerous offenders off the street, and bring justice to survivors. Current Minnesota law does not require a lab kit testing timeline, leaving it to the lab's discretion. To date, 19 states and Washington, D.C. have required state crime labs to test rape kits within a certain time frame. With H.F. 2034, Minnesota is poised to join these states.

Every 68 seconds, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States. Each year, there are more than 2,400 rapes reported in Minnesota. In the immediate aftermath, a victim may choose to undergo a medical forensic examination—which can take four to six hours—to collect DNA evidence left behind by the attacker in what is commonly called a rape kit. When tested, this evidence can identify an unknown assailant, reveal serial offenders, and exonerate the wrongfully convicted. Too often, however, rape kits are left untested on evidence room shelves.

Take this case for example. On September 2, 2022, Tennessee resident [Eliza Fletcher](#) was murdered by a dangerous man with a long history of criminal activity, which started at 11 years old and included theft, burglary, aggravated assault, aggravated robbery, aggravated kidnapping, and rape. One year before Eliza's killing, another victim was raped by him. Police did not take her case seriously and her rape kit sat in a queue for about a year, gathering dust. If this case had been prioritized and the rape kit had been tested swiftly, Eliza would be alive today.

H.F. 2034 would require a forensic lab to test newly collected kits within 90 days of receipt from a hospital or law enforcement agency. Upon completion of testing, the forensic laboratory will update the kit-tracking database to indicate that testing is complete. The forensic laboratory must notify the submitting agency when any kit testing does not meet the 90-day deadline and provide an estimated time frame for testing completion. These provisions ensure that newly collected rape kits are tested expeditiously across the state and prevent future backlogs. Additionally, this bill would align the state with [federal best practices](#), which recommend using a Direct to

DNA approach that may allow a laboratory to achieve a two- to four-week turnaround time.

Unequivocally, swiftly testing rape kits solves and prevents crimes. By testing every kit connected to a reported crime, more DNA profiles will be in local, state and national databases, potentially revealing [serial rapists](#). Recent research has shown serial rapists assault both acquaintances and strangers, and often commit multiple crimes from burglary to homicide. In Eliza Fletcher's case, the offender had committed an acquaintance rape a year earlier. Testing that kit would have saved Eliza's life. Even more, testing every rape kit sends a message to survivors that they—and their cases—matter and to perpetrators that we will use every tool to bring them to accountability.

Testing rape kits also saves communities millions of dollars. According to a study from the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education at Case Western Reserve University, testing 4,300 previously unsubmitted kits in Cleveland has **saved the community \$38.7 million dollars**, or \$8,893 per tested sexual assault kit. Another study showed that processing every rape kit could be one of the most effective uses of state funds. Testing backlogged rape kits can produce an astounding **65,000% return on investment**.

By mandating all rape kits submitted to laboratories to be swiftly tested, H.F. 2034 provides a critical step toward comprehensive rape kit reform in Minnesota.

We urge you to pass this important legislation out of committee. The Joyful Heart Foundation thanks you for your efforts on this issue. We stand ready to assist you in creating safer communities and offering a path to healing and justice to all sexual assault survivors in Minnesota.

Sincerely,

Ilse Knecht



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