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Dear Chair and Committee Members,

In the early morning hours of April 11, 2008, I was raped after a night of partying with friends. I came from a conservative Catholic family and had grown up hearing messages about victims “asking for it” by consuming alcohol, wearing a short skirt, any number of imagined offenses which I was taught to believe somehow justified the violation of another’s body in the most intimate and horrific way possible. So, because of my upbringing and the fear that I would be blamed for what happened, I didn’t go to the hospital or report my rape to the police. I genuinely believed I had brought it on myself.

After initial medical attention, I struggled silently until over a year later when I finally disclosed to my longtime nurse practitioner. She responded with immense compassion and concern, encouraged me to get into counseling, and regularly checked in with me for the rest of the duration of our patient-provider relationship.

Over the course of the subsequent years I began volunteering with the RAINN Online Hotline in the hopes that I could keep someone else from feeling as alone as I had felt. I wanted every patient to have the same positive, life-changing experience that my nurse practitioner provided for me. Today, I’m the Program Services Coordinator at my local domestic violence agency. I love my work immensely, but one of the most difficult parts is seeing my clients struggle to navigate a legal system which often does not serve their needs in the way that it should. Hardly anything is easy or straightforward, and often it seems like it’s one thing after the other for my clients.

I know how long that 20 minutes waiting for a HIV test feels -- I can only imagine the stress and anxiety of having a rape kit languish on an unidentified shelf, unable to track its status, whether it has been tested, or even if it exists anymore (as some state laws allow the kits to be destroyed after as little as 30 days). I can’t imagine constantly just WAITING for the phone to ring -- have they tested the kit? Did they find the perpetrator? And if so, what comes next? I’ve seen the struggles faced by survivors I spoke with through both RAINN and at the DV agency, and I am moved to make things better for them. In many cases, they do everything they are “supposed” to do and still do not receive justice. We tell them to report it, to go to the ER, to do all these hard, retraumatizing things, and then after they do it we do not give them the support or resolution that they need.

HF 2034 is taking a common sense, straightforward approach to removing some of the roadblocks that should never have existed in the first place. What we put survivors through is completely unacceptable, it must be fixed, and I want to be a part of the solution.