

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Bipartisan Legislation Expanding Sexual Assault Victim's Bill of Rights

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TRENTON — Today, Governor Phil Murphy signed S1017/A3748 into law, requiring that victims of sexual assault be notified of certain developments concerning the evidence in their respective cases. This legislation expands New Jersey's existing Sexual Assault Victim's Bill of Rights, ensuring survivors are granted the updates to which they are entitled.

The Sexual Assault Victim's Bill of Rights was enacted in 2019 to outline basic protections and fundamental rights for sexual assault survivors. It guarantees that allegations be treated with dignity and compassion, as well as several other entitlements and protections to be granted throughout investigation proceedings.

"We commend the courage and bravery exhibited by sexual assault survivors that have come forward and we are here to support them on every step of their journeys to justice," **said Governor Phil Murphy**. "This bipartisan legislation increases transparency with law enforcement to ensure a victim-centered approach and guarantee that survivors and their cases are treated with the care and consideration they deserve. I am proud to sign this bill into law, marking another step forward in building a safer, fairer New Jersey for all."

"Victims of sexual assault have a right to know the details of their cases. New Jersey's survivor-centered, trauma-informed policies have already made great strides in making our criminal justice system more accessible to survivors," **said Attorney General Platkin**. "With this critical legislation, Governor Murphy and the Legislature are not only increasing our chances of successfully prosecuting sexual violence offenders and diminishing their threat to public safety, they are also helping to increase survivors' trust in our justice system."

The following developments in sexual assault investigations are now explicitly required to be shared with the victim:

1. If a DNA profile of an assailant was obtained during the processing of evidence
2. If a DNA profile of an assailant has been entered into a data bank used for the retention or comparison of case evidence
3. If there is a match between the DNA profile of an assailant and another DNA profile in any data bank used for the retention or comparison of case evidence
4. If sexual assault evidence is submitted to a forensic laboratory, if that evidence is compared against any data bank, and the results of the comparison

At the request of the victim, the law enforcement agency responsible for the sexual assault investigation must provide updates on the status of all evidence collected. Another individual may be designated by the victim to receive the same information regarding any advancements in the case.

Victims of sexual assault have historically been intimidated, discredited, and shamed upon sharing their stories. This kind of response can often discourage a victim from proceeding with an investigation, thus diminishing their rights and protections within the system. Today's legislation aims to address this concern by affording victims additional rights to information pertaining to their cases, creating a process that allows for vulnerability and incentivizing more sexual assault victims to come forward and seek justice.

"Having access to information related to their cases can help survivors of sexual violence in their healing journeys," **said Patricia Teffenhart, Executive Director of the Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance.** "By enacting this legislation, Governor Murphy and the Legislature are once again raising New Jersey's standard in putting survivors at the center of our justice-seeking efforts."

The primary sponsors of S1017/A3748 are Senators Linda Greenstein and Declan O'Scanlon, and Assemblywomen Carol Murphy, Michele Matsikoudis, and Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.

"Victims of sexual violence deserve to be kept up-to-date and aware of all major developments in the investigation of their case, both for their peace of mind and for their safety," **said Senator Linda Greenstein, Chair of the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee.** "The enactment of this legislation will help ensure that they have access to these rights, and assist police departments with having clarity as to the extent of their obligation to share this information with victims."

"This crucial legislation guarantees that survivors of sexual assault are updated with necessary information throughout the legal process of their case," **said Senator Declan O'Scanlon.** "With this law in place, we are empowering survivors and ensuring that our criminal justice system is more responsive to their needs."

"Research shows that when survivors of sexual assault are kept informed about their cases, it can be a vital part of their healing journey," **said Assemblywoman Carol Murphy.** "This bill is designed to rebuild trust and ensure that survivors are fully informed and supported after enduring the difficult process of examinations and recounting their experiences."

"When a sexual assault survivor bravely chooses to come forward, report the crime, and have an evidence kit administered, our state has a duty to provide that survivor with clear updates on the handling of DNA evidence from their case every step of the way. Increasing communication between law enforcement and victims of these crimes helps ensure that justice is served and rightfully places power back into the hands of survivors. I am proud to see New Jersey take this important step and grateful for all those who have bravely advocated for getting us here," **said Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis.**

"Every piece of evidence in a sexual assault case holds immense weight for the survivor, who deserves to be informed about the status of the case," **said Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson.** "Effective communication between law enforcement and victims empowers the survivors, gives them support through the legal process, and reinforces our commitment to transparency."

"The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) thanks Governor Murphy and the sponsors of Bill A3748/S1017, which enhances the Sexual Assault Victim's Bill of Rights (SAVBR)," **said Denise Rodriguez, Co-Director of the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault.** "This bill represents an advancement in the protection and empowerment of survivors of sexual assault by ensuring they are kept informed about key developments in their cases. By providing survivors with timely and detailed updates, the bill not only respects their right to be informed but also supports their engagement in the legal process. Additionally, allowing survivors to designate a trusted person to receive this information further acknowledges the diverse needs and circumstances of each individual. This provision is a vital step toward ensuring that survivors can access necessary updates in a manner that is both manageable and respectful

of their personal situations and preferences. The bill's focus on clarity and transparency in communication between law enforcement and survivors underscores a commitment to enhancing the survivor experience within the criminal legal system and is respectful of the healing process. Overall, Bill A3748/S1017 is a meaningful and necessary update to the SAVBR, reinforcing our collective commitment to upholding the rights of survivors. We commend the passage of this bill and hope all survivors receive the comprehensive support and information they deserve."

"NJCEDV joins NJCASA in thanking Governor Murphy, Senator Greenstein, and Assemblywoman Murphy for the passing of A-3748/S-1017 which expands the rights of sexual assault survivors," **said Adrienne Gantz, Co-Executive Director for the New Jersey Coalition to End Domestic Violence.** "With this expansion of the Sexual Assault Victim's Bill of Rights, survivors have greater control over their information and will be better informed about their case. Providing this kind of transparency is central to empowering victims, which is an important step toward healing."

Governor Phil Murphy

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