

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Establishing Rape Kit Tracking System

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TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed [S715/A908](https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/S1000/715_I1.PDF) (https://pub.njleg.state.nj.us/Bills/2024/S1000/715_I1.PDF), which requires the Office of the Attorney General to establish an internet-based rape kit tracking system. The bill, which unanimously passed both the Senate and General Assembly before reaching the Governor's desk, requires the Attorney General to issue guidelines or a directive establishing a sexual assault forensic evidence (SAFE) kit tracking system accessible to the victim; State, county, or municipal law enforcement officers; and, as deemed appropriate, employees of a health care facility or laboratory.

"Survivors of sexual assault who show strength and resilience in coming forward deserve recognition and support," **said Governor Murphy**. "This well overdue bill cements into law the work our Administration has undertaken to support survivors. Through the groundwork laid by the Office of the Attorney General, in collaboration with the Division of Violence Intervention and Victim Assistance, the Division of Criminal Justice, and other law enforcement officials, survivors will have access to a dedicated tracking system to stay informed through every step of their pursuit of justice."

"In New Jersey, we understand the impact of sexual assault victimization and have been implementing survivor-centered, trauma-informed policies in response," **said Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin**. "In March 2023, we issued a Directive that expands the amount of time we retain SAFE kits and have since required all kits submitted to law enforcement with the survivors consent be brought to the lab for analysis. In 2023, LPS secured federal funding to create a sexual assault kit tracking system that will provide more transparency and autonomy to those who have been harmed. For more than a year, we have been coordinating with multiple State agencies to implement this system. We thank the Legislature and Governor Murphy for sharing these priorities."

In 2023, Attorney General Platkin announced the receipt of \$2 million in competitive federal funding to establish an advanced tracking system for the state's SAFE kits.

Later that year, Attorney General Platkin issued a statewide law enforcement directive to ensure that sexual assault survivors have access to the medical, investigative, and supportive services they need and deserve, and that evidence collected in sexual assault cases is preserved and processed in a victim-centered and efficient manner. This directive extended the required retention period for evidence, including DNA evidence, from sexual assault medical examinations from five years to 20 years; established statewide procedures and guidelines for tracking, storing, and determining how and when such evidence is submitted for testing; and mandated that all SAFE Kits provided to law enforcement with a victim's consent be submitted to the forensic laboratory for testing.

The primary sponsors of the legislation are Senator Renee Burgess and Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson. Other prime sponsors include Senator Paul Moriarty, Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis, and Assemblywoman Annette Quijano.

"This law is a critical step forward in ensuring justice and support for survivors of sexual violence. By establishing a rape kit tracking system, we are providing survivors with the transparency they deserve and holding the system accountable for its role in securing justice," **said Senator Burgess**. "When it comes to a rape or sexual assault, the gathering and preservation of physical evidence is of paramount importance to improving New Jersey's response to

sexual assault cases and helping to restore trust in our criminal justice system."

"This legislation is a significant moment in our fight to ensure justice for survivors of sexual assault. The implementation of SAFE Kit procedures to be used in rape or sexual assault cases provides law enforcement with an invaluable tool as they conduct their investigations and also offers survivors peace of mind as they navigate a system that too often leaves them in the dark," **said Senator Moriarty**. "This legislation puts New Jersey solidly in line with several other states, enabling investigators to track evidence better and streamline data in pursuing justice."

"Establishing a tracking system for sexual assault forensic evidence kits is of the utmost importance, ensuring a level of transparency and healing exists within our communities," **said Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson**. "Through A908, we aim to empower victims by providing them with the ability to track the progress of their evidence, ensuring their voices are heard and their rights are protected."

"Allowing survivors of sexual assault to track their kits puts power back into their hands and provides critical transparency during the investigative process. This law acknowledges the immense courage and vulnerability of victims, as well as the deficiencies in our justice system. I am proud to sponsor a law that makes New Jersey a more just place for those who have experienced the trauma of rape and sexual assault," **said Assemblywoman Matsikoudis**.

"The signing of this bill is a significant milestone in our commitment to protecting the rights of survivors, ensuring that sexual assault-related evidence is not only thoroughly examined but also treated with the utmost respect and care," **said Assemblywoman Quijano**. "It is also a crucial step towards ensuring a more timely investigation of sexual assault cases in New Jersey and bringing justice and timely closure for victims."

"The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCASA) commends Governor Murphy for his signing of S715/A908 to establish a statewide rape kit tracking system in New Jersey. We are confident that this system will enable survivors to check on the status of a kit's processing, fostering greater transparency, efficiency, and accountability in the handling of sexual assault evidence, and thereby empowering survivors. NJCASA is grateful to all who supported this bill and applauds their commitment to survivors of sexual violence and their loved ones," **said Denise Rodriguez, PhD, Co-Director, New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault**.

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