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## **NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Statewide Sexual Assault Response Team Members Call on Assembly to Take Up AB 214 to Prevent a Future Backlog of Sexual Assault Kits**

MADISON, Wis. – Criminal justice professionals are calling on the Assembly Committee on Health to reject Assembly Bill 844 at a public hearing today, and to instead move Assembly Bill 214 forward in order to prevent a future backlog of untested sexual assault kits,

Despite broad support of AB 214, Rep. Joe Sanfelippo (R-West Allis), chair of the Assembly Committee on Health, has refused to hold a public hearing on the bill, since it was introduced in May 2019. There is strong support for this legislation:

- The legislation is co-sponsored by 72 senators and representatives (47 Democrats, 25 Republicans), including a majority of the members of the State Assembly (56).
- The legislation was approved 5-0 in the Senate Committee on Insurance, Financial Services, Government Oversight and Courts.
- The legislation was passed by the State Senate on a voice vote in October 2019.

Late last week, a group of Assembly Republicans introduced new legislation regarding sexual assault kits (AB 844), but subject matter experts from around Wisconsin are calling on the committee to instead act on AB 214.

The Attorney General's Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) legislative working group and other criminal justice professionals drafted AB 214 with the Wisconsin Department of Justice. **Below are statements from SART members and a national advocate regarding today's public hearing.**

The SART was created in 2012 by then Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen. The team is composed of a multidisciplinary group of professionals from around Wisconsin knowledgeable in the complex issues surrounding sexual assault. The AG SART is tasked with, among other things, the responsibility to ensure that all sexual assault kits (SAKs) are created, distributed, used, and collected in an efficient and expedient manner, evaluating the composition of medical forensic collection kits, and standardizing billing practices for SANE exams.

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“The Attorney General's Sexual Assault Response Team is a multi-disciplinary team of subject matter experts involving all facets of sexual assault from throughout the State of Wisconsin. This team was started by AG Van Hollen and continued under AG Kaul.

I was a founding member of our local Sexual Assault Response Team, serving from 2008 to 2017, at which point AG Schimel appointed me to the AG's SART. Shortly thereafter, AG Schimel appointed me Co-Chair of the statewide SART. That appointment has continued under AG Kaul.

During that tenure, I have been involved in the regular discussions with statewide subject matter experts regarding the best practices surrounding all sexual assault related matters, but as it pertains to this discussion, specifically submission of sexual assault kits for testing. We sought and received feedback from personnel in a variety of disciplines related to workable timelines related to submission of kits, and that feedback and the SART's ongoing discussions are what led to AB 214, the bipartisan supported bill previously submitted. I implore you to accept the counsel and direction of the subject matter experts from around the state, represented on a functioning Multi-Disciplinary Team known as the AG SART, and support AB 214.”

*- Captain Corey Norlander, AG SART Co-Chair  
Sheboygan County Sheriff's Office*

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“As a prosecutor, one of the most important pieces of evidence in a sexual assault case is the forensic evidence kit. Delay in timely analysis of the contents of a kit can slow criminal proceedings, sometimes even forcing the reset of trial dates. AB 214 was written to ensure that Wisconsin would never again be one of those states or jurisdictions with an unacceptable backlog of kits, inappropriately sitting on shelves collecting dust. This bill was written with input from a variety of non-partisan subject-matter experts from around the state: the Attorney General's Sexual Assault Response Team (AG SART). It codifies the ways that actors within the system (police,

forensic nurse examiners, and the crime laboratory personnel) should appropriately deal with kits to ensure timely processing and reporting, and also to ensure that the victim/survivor is treated in a trauma-informed and victim-centered way. It should also be noted that while AG Kaul is a proponent of this bill, the AG SART was actively working on the recommendations for this legislation under then-AG Schimel. This should underscore that AB 214 is not a Republican bill or Democratic bill; it is a bill to help victims/survivors, to provide a framework for systemic actors, and to expedite the testing of evidence. Simply put, there is absolutely no reason that AB 214's passage should be delayed any longer than it already has."

- *Assistant District Attorney Rick Spoentgen*  
*Sauk County District Attorney's Office*

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"A lot of thought, effort and expertise went into the drafting of AB 214 by multiple professionals in the AG SART who care for and work with survivors of sexual assault. It is disheartening to hear that the Health Committee declined to hold a public hearing on AB 214 and have decided to move forward with AB 844 instead. As a Forensic Nurse who provides care for victims of crime I was hoping to have legislation that protects mine and my fellow cohorts work in the field. AB 844 lacks that support and in fact hurts the profession we love."

- *Jamie Counsell-Barker, BSN, RN, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner*  
*Wisconsin Chapter- International Association of Forensic Nurses, Past President*  
*Mercy Hospital and Trauma Center*

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"As a sexual assault nurse examiner for 25+ years & involved in victim care & processes on a daily basis, It is disheartening and disappointing that the thoughtful, trauma-informed prioritized recommendations by statewide sexual assault experts (imbedded in AB214) to continue the positive strides and momentum to prevent future sexual assault kit backlogs and for the creation of a tracking system for survivors to monitor the progress of their kit were not valued in informing legislation that will truly support victims and those that support response to sexual assault in our Wisconsin communities."

- *Deb Donovan, RN, SANE-A, SANE-P*  
*Froedtert Hospital*

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"Without a mandate to submit all rape kits connected to a reported crime, any progress that has been made in Wisconsin will be undermined. The only way to ensure consistency in the criminal justice process is to lock these policies into law. After a long unexplained delay, instead of passing the bipartisan AB 214, the committee is considering a new bill that none of the relevant stakeholders are endorsing and is only sponsored by one party. Joyful Heart has been involved in reform laws across the country, and we have never experienced this issue being mired in party politics before now. Wisconsin communities and survivors don't have time for this. The time for reform is now."

*- Ilse Knecht, Director of Policy & Advocacy  
Joyful Heart Foundation*

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