



**Josh Kaul**  
Wisconsin Attorney General

**P.O. Box 7857**  
**Madison, WI 53707-7857**

---

## **NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

April 4, 2023

### **Wisconsin DOJ Debunks #SexualAssaultMyths and Shares Resources for Survivors**

MADISON, Wis. – In honor of Sexual Assault Awareness Month, Attorney General Josh Kaul’s Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) is debunking #SexaulAssaultMyths and sharing resources available through the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ). Every week during the month of April a new myth about sexual assault will be debunked on social media. Follow along on Wisconsin DOJ’s [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Week one’s myth: many reports of sexual assault are false. To the contrary, no data suggests that rates of false reporting are higher in sexual assault cases than they are for any other criminal case. Tyler J. Buller, [Fighting Rape Culture With Noncorroboration Instructions](#), 53 Tulsa L. Rev. 1 (2017). Check the Wisconsin DOJ’s social media channels weekly for a new debunked myth.

“Debunking myths about sexual assault is one small way we can show support for survivors,” said Attorney General Josh Kaul. “The Wisconsin Department of Justice is proud to stand up for survivors of sexual assault and to work to hold perpetrators who commit that violent crime accountable.”

To support survivors, and to improve the criminal justice response when a survivor reports an assault, Wisconsin DOJ is proud to offer the following resources.

**OCVS**

Within Wisconsin DOJ is the Office of Crime Victim Services (OCVS) which houses many resources and programs for crime victims, their family and friends, victim service providers, and criminal justice professionals. The Victim Resource Center (VRC) within OCVS specializes in assisting victims of crime with information, referrals, and questions regarding their crime victim and witness rights. In addition, the VRC provides assistance with understanding and participating in the criminal justice system, receiving and addressing rights complaints, and administering the Victim Appellate Notification System.

OCVS administers several grant programs that support survivor access to sexual assault services statewide, including rape crisis centers; personal, legal, and medical advocacy services; 24/7 crisis lines; support groups; and community outreach efforts throughout Wisconsin. OCVS also administers the Wisconsin Sexual Assault Forensic Exam Fund, which reimburses health care providers directly for the cost of a forensic medical exam for victims of sexual assault, and the Crime Victim Compensation Program, which can assist victims with crime-related out-of-pocket expenses such as lost wages, medical and mental health expenses. The statewide Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) training and technical assistance program is also coordinated by OCVS, providing critical training for forensic nurses providing medical care to sexual assault survivors and evidence collection for sexual assault kits.

To find local support for sexual assault survivors, please visit <https://www.doj.state.wi.us/ocvs/find-local-crime-victim-resources>

## **Sexual Assault Kit Reform**

In 2015, the AG SART originated with the [Wisconsin Sexual Assault Kit Initiative](#), which is a statewide effort to address the prior accumulation of unsubmitted sexual assault kits that were in the possession of local law enforcement agencies and hospitals. Despite this effort, there was no clear statutory requirements for the collection and processing these kits.

In December of 2021, Governor Evers signed sexual assault kit reform into law. The law requires that sexual assault kits in Wisconsin are collected and sent to the Wisconsin State Crime Labs efficiently and expediently. The AG SART played a key role in developing the legislation, which aims to prevent a backlog in the future.

## **By Your Side**

Wisconsin DOJ and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) partnered to develop [By Your Side](#), a resource created as part of the WiSAKI, to help sexual assault survivors learn about the status of their sexual assault kit and find supportive services in their community. The services offered are free and confidential, including emotional support, information, and referrals no matter how long ago the sexual assault happened. The services are also available to support family members, partners, and friends of survivors.

## **Sexual Assault Response Teams**

Wisconsin DOJ offers guidance and support for local communities working to develop and sustain Sexual Assault Response Teams. A SART can empower and support survivors engaging with the criminal justice system by initiating a collaborative response to provide support, information, options, and resources. Communities with an active SART report:

- Survivors more likely to receive referrals to advocacy services;
- Survivors more likely to receive referrals to medical services;
- Improvements in support for survivors in the criminal justice system process;
- Increase in the number of assaults reported to law enforcement;
- Survivors more engaged with the investigation; and,
- Survivors more engaged with prosecutors during court prep.

The trauma-informed response of a SART not only benefits survivors but multidisciplinary partners as well.

## **Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse Initiative**

Wisconsin DOJ has also launched the Clergy and Faith Leader Abuse initiative. The primary goal of this initiative is to provide victims and survivors with an independent and thorough review of the sexual abuse committed by clergy and faith leaders in Wisconsin, no matter when that abuse occurred. Through this initiative, Wisconsin DOJ will provide victims and survivors with a safe and confidential means to obtain support from the Wisconsin DOJ Office of Crime Victim Services and referrals to available service providers. The initiative also provides a confidential means for victims and survivors to report sexual abuse by clergy and faith leaders, and for others who have witnessed, know about, or suspect such abuse to report it.

Wisconsin DOJ will review all reports and refer them, with the victim's consent, to local law enforcement when appropriate.

Wisconsin DOJ is continuing to take reports from survivors of clergy or faith leader abuse or their friends and family. All are encouraged to report that information to Wisconsin DOJ either online at [SupportSurvivors.wisconsin.gov](https://SupportSurvivors.wisconsin.gov) or by calling 1-877-222-2620.

### **Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women Taskforce**

The Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW) Taskforce is charged with helping in the fight against Indigenous women abduction, homicide, violence, and trafficking in Wisconsin. This multidisciplinary taskforce examines the causes of MMIW and the responses of social service organizations, as well as the roles of federal, state, and tribal jurisdictions. Learn more about the taskforce [here](#).

### **Prosecution and Training**

Wisconsin DOJ attorneys defend sexual assault convictions at the appellate level and prosecute them at the trial level. Assistant Attorneys General successfully defended sexual assault convictions from Juneau, Waukesha, and Racine counties before the Wisconsin Supreme Court. In January of this year Wisconsin Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (WiSAKI) prosecutors, successfully prosecuted [Kevin McDowell](#) in Dane County for Second Degree Sexual Assault by Use of Force.

Wisconsin DOJ also offers training to help Wisconsin prosecutors navigate these intricate cases. Attorney General Kaul was Wisconsin's first Attorney General to identify the need for a Sexual Assault Resource Prosecutor and garner bipartisan legislative support to fund a project position. In 2022, Wisconsin DOJ's Sexual Assault Resource Prosecutor developed and spearheaded a series of two and 1/2-day regional training courses to support Wisconsin prosecutors. The courses were held in La Crosse, Superior, Waukesha, and Appleton. In addition to the regional trainings, webinars and online resources are regularly provided for local prosecutors. While the original project position expires in July of 2023, Attorney General Kaul believes "the importance and effectiveness of this position speaks for itself," and he has asked the legislature to continue its bipartisan support.