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February 3, 2017

Representative Angela Romero
P.O. Box 25732
Salt Lake City, UT 84125

Dear Representative Romero,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports H.B. 200, Sexual Assault Kit Processing Amendments. This bill would mandate the testing of all rape kits, require annual reporting on the processing of rape kits, establish victims' rights, and authorize the development of a statewide kit tracking system with a victim portal.

Every year, thousands of victims of sexual assault undergo invasive and exhaustive forensic medical exam, which can take between four and eight hours, to collect evidence left behind by the attacker. This evidence is preserved in a sexual assault evidence-or rape-kit. DNA evidence is an invaluable investigative tool. When tested, rape kit evidence can identify an unknown assailant, reveal serial offenders, and exonerate the wrongly convicted. Too often, however, rape kits are left untested, stored in facilities, and left on shelves.

In 2014, the Salt Lake Tribune reported that Utah had an estimated backlog of 2,750 untested rape kits. In 2015, Utah was awarded a federal grant from the National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) to combat the backlog. While progress has been made, the problem remains. The SAKI team estimates there are **currently more than 1,000 untested kits in Utah**. Recent research by Dr. Julie Valentine at Brigham Young University sheds light on the problem. Her study found that, **within a year of an assault, only 22.8 percent of sexual assault kits in Utah are submitted** for forensic analysis. We must do better.

Eliminating the backlog and bringing offenders to justice will require submitting all rape kits, tracking those kits from collection to analysis, and transparency and accountability from all criminal justice and medical professionals that handle rape kits. And, most importantly, we must create this change in a way that provides survivors with both the rights and the information they need to heal and move forward.

H.B. 200 enacts these critical reforms, and we thank you for your leadership on this bill. The Joyful Heart Foundation stands ready to assist you in your efforts to end the backlog in Utah and bring justice and healing to sexual assault survivors. Together, we can bring about much-needed change.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ilse Knecht". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ilse Knecht
Director, Policy & Advocacy

