(https://www.caase.org/)

Expanding Rape Kit Access

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When Emergency Rooms feel unsafe, survivors need options

June 10, 2020

Victims of sexual assault will soon have expanded options for accessing forensic exams and evidence collection (commonly known as "rape kits"). The help of supporters like you and the coordinated efforts of many survivor-centered organizations made this possible.

Until recently, Illinois law said that rape kit examinations could only be conducted in approved hospital Emergency Departments. That's a big problem during a pandemic when people do not feel safe going to the ER. Recent information suggests that during the last few months, due to COVID-19, many victims of sexual assault avoided hospitals altogether. Unfortunately, because rape kits can play a key role in successfully prosecuting rape, this means poorer outcomes for individual survivors and our community at large.

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WHEN EMERGENCY ROOMS FEEL UNSAFE SURVIVORS NEED OPTIONS

With your help, CAASE and our allies successfully advocated to expand evidence collection sites! Because of our work, approved federally qualified health centers can now submit sexual assault treatment plans to the Illinois Department of Public Health. When approved, they will follow the strict guidelines of the Sexual Assault Survivors Emergency Treatment Act and meet the same requirements as ERs, including:

- Meeting or exceeding current training requirements for care providers,
- Having cooperative partnerships with pediatric and emergency department facilities, as well as rape crisis centers,
- Abiding by the jurisdiction of all relevant authorities to allow monitoring and for chain-of-custody requirements,
- Not charging survivors for any treatment and providing free follow up care.

We will be keeping you up to date as federally qualified health centers are approved in Chicago. As always, we encourage people to call rape crisis center hotlines to get the latest information about options available to survivors.

Thank you to everyone who recognized that survivors need options and contacted legislators to show your support for this change. We are also deeply grateful to the policymakers who supported it all along. By expanding evidence collection locations outside of ERs, we are expanding access to justice.

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Special thanks to these organizations and legislators that supported this initiative:

Governmental/Law Enforcement Agencies

Cook County State's Attorney

Illinois State's Attorneys Association

Rockford Mayor's Office on Domestic Violence and Human Trafficking

Medical Facilities

Chicago Children's Advocacy Center

Esperanza Health Center

Howard Brown Health Center

Planned Parenthood of Illinois

Gender Justice and Civil Rights Organizations

Chicago Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

Chicago Says No More

Legal Aid Society of Metropolitan Family Services

Life Span

Metropolitan Family Services

Mujeres Latinas En Accion

The Network: Advocating Against Domestic Violence

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Rockford Alliance Against Sexual Exploitation

Resilience (formerly known as Rape Victim Advocates)

Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Legislators

Representative Kelly Cassidy

Representative Margo McDermed

Senator Melinda Bush

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