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KBI announces SAKI findings, launches public awareness campaign

TOPEKA--The Kansas Bureau of Investigation (KBI) on Thursday announced findings and recommendations resulting from a five-year collaborative effort to identify, inventory, and test previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits in Kansas. Achievements of the Kansas Sexual Assault Kit Initiative ([SAKI](#)) were detailed, and a new statewide public awareness campaign to confront social biases related to sexual assault was launched.

In 2014, the KBI formed the Kansas SAKI project. In 2017, Kansas became the first state in the country to complete the statewide inventory with 100 percent voluntary law enforcement participation. As a result, 2,200 previously unsubmitted sexual assault kits were identified. Local law enforcement agencies submitted the majority of those kits to a forensic laboratory for analysis. Testing has been completed on nearly 2,000 kits. Testing on the remaining kits is expected to be completed by the end of October.

“Because of our leadership role in public safety, it was important for us to initiate this project and collaborate with key stakeholders to implement a statewide strategy that we believe will help solve crimes and prevent additional victimization of our citizens,” KBI Director Kirk Thompson said. “Having substantially completed testing on so many kits using in-state laboratories was a significant undertaking, and a noteworthy accomplishment. As a result, we have identified serial sexual offenders and solved cases.”

To date, forensic testing enabled 373 biological profiles from evidence to be entered into the Combined DNA Indexing System (CODIS) and resulted in 234 CODIS hits, each of which may be considered a new investigative lead in a criminal case. As a result of the SAKI project, two cases were successfully prosecuted and one other resulted in an acquittal. Several criminal cases are still pending review by local law enforcement and prosecutors.

“Since the KBI proactively initiated these efforts more than five years ago, a great amount of work has been done to test the backlog of kits and to address the underlying issues that led to the backlog,” Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt said. “I am grateful to the remarkable group of experts who came together to make this happen, and I’m confident that we will continue to experience SAKI’s positive impact on victims and investigations of sexual assault in Kansas moving forward.”

Evaluating the kits associated with this Initiative also provided valuable information about the link between sexual assault and other violent crimes - something the KBI researched extensively. They found that 93% of the suspects named in the SAKI cases had criminal histories that included other violent offenses. Collectively, these same individuals committed over 7,000 additional crimes. The multidisciplinary working group felt strongly that these staggering numbers demanded more proactive attention and action.

Beyond generating new investigative leads in criminal cases, they kindled efforts to reform law enforcement practices, increase laboratory resources, increase victims' access to services and support, and improve the outcome of criminal cases. Through the SAKI project, over 1,300 Kansas professionals were trained on trauma-informed sexual assault investigation and the importance of a multidisciplinary response to sexual assault.

“Responses to sexual assault have historically been fragmented. Victims often have to navigate difficult systems with limited support,” said Joyce Grover, executive director of the Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. “This project has addressed work that was long overdue in Kansas. By coordinating our efforts and recognizing the importance of advocacy and a trauma-informed response, I am hopeful we have made and will continue to make big changes in Kansas.”

The KBI used SAKI project funding to commission the development of a unique statewide public awareness campaign focused on educating Kansans about the prevalence and realities of sexual assault. The campaign also seeks to overcome the normalization of sexual violence, and other common biases surrounding sexual assault.

The campaign, titled “Yes, This Room,” includes broadcast TV and digital messages directing viewers to a website that includes conversation guides for the general public, parents, medical providers, and university students. To view the website and conversation guides, visit www.YesThisRoom.com.

“Through SAKI, we became keenly aware of how infrequently sexual perpetrators are held accountable for the crimes they commit and how often they go on to commit other acts of violence. This demanded our immediate attention,” said Katie Whisman, KBI executive officer and Kansas SAKI project director. “We quickly realized that increasing offender accountability also required involvement of the public, and the idea for a statewide public awareness campaign was born.”

The “Yes, This Room” campaign calls on Kansans to become familiar with the facts, myths, and biases about sexual assault, and to use that information to shift the current narratives surrounding sexual assault. It encourages Kansas to focus on the offender’s role in sexual violence so our communities will be safer places to learn, work, and live.

The KBI partnered with Bajillion Agency in Topeka, Kan. for development of the “Yes, This Room” campaign concept and creative work. The efforts of the KBI and the Kansas Sexual Assault Kit Initiative were made possible by FY 2015 funding awarded to the KBI by the Bureau of Justice Assistance through the National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative grant program. The grant period for the KBI award ended on September 30, 2019.

Find video footage, campaign materials, and additional information at this link:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1t75yW2Yuhy-HGxVA2ktrb3cjvgGzJ197>

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