

**ANDRÉ JACQUE**

STATE SENATOR • 1<sup>ST</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

Phone: (608) 266-3512

Fax: (608) 282-3541

Sen.Jacque@legis.wi.gov

State Capitol • P.O. Box 7882

Madison, WI 53707-7882

*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety*

*Senator André Jacque*

*May 10, 2023*

Chairman Wanggaard and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify as the author in support of Senate Bill 43, the Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors Act.

Senate Bill 43 would require the Department of Justice to test the sexual assault kit of a victim who consents to its analysis within 90 days of collection by law enforcement, in order to provide information to investigators, assist in providing closure to survivors, and prevent a future backlog of untested kits from occurring for victims pursuing justice.

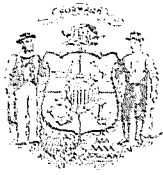
This legislation was introduced last session as 2021 SB 814 with the formal support of the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) and the Joyful Heart Foundation and is also a component of the Wisconsin Sexual Abuse Survivors' Bill of Rights legislation developed in coordination with the sexual assault survivor non-profit Rise. This bill was also passed within legislation by the State Assembly in February 2020.

With the enactment of 2021 Wisconsin Act 116, pre-existing protocols for local law enforcement submission of sexual assault kits to DOJ are now codified into state statute. Even with this positive step, Wisconsin, unlike several states, unfortunately remains without a testing requirement for sexual assault kits in state possession where a survivor of sexual assault consents to the analysis.

According to Brown County Sexual Assault Center's Samantha Bouressa, this is important, "Because right now, the kits that are sent down are kind of prioritized. And so sometimes we have cases where it takes months to get back the results." (see story attached).

Eight states (including neighboring Michigan) as well as the District of Columbia already have a statutory requirement that sexual assault kits must be processed by at least 90 days from collection (Connecticut and Kentucky have 60 day testing requirement and Massachusetts has a 30 day testing requirement).

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 43. I'm happy to answer any questions.



## Wisconsin lawmaker proposes Sexual Assault Survivor Bill of Rights

(KOSA)

By Sarah Thomsen

Published: May. 21, 2019 at 4:11 PM CDT

Sexual assault survivors may soon be guaranteed more rights in Wisconsin.

A De Pere lawmaker is looking for co-sponsors for a Sexual Assault Survivor Bill of Rights. It would make Wisconsin the 21st state to adopt such a law.

"We have people calling or coming into our office all the time that, for whatever reason, everyone's situation is unique, that today's the day they want to report," says Samantha Bouressa, Program Supervisor, Sexual Assault Center.

In the first three months of 2019, the Sexual Assault Center in Brown County has served 434 victims, and helped 127 people during Sexual Assault Nurse Exams (SANE). The exams are taken immediately after a sexual assault.

Bouressa says arming survivors with a voice and knowledge is critical.

"I think what this bill does is it gives that sense of security to victims, to survivors, to know that going forward, they are being heard," says Sen. Andre Jacque (R-De Pere).

Sen. Jacque is proposing the survivor's bill. It includes a requirement that rape kits be tested within 90 days of being submitted.

Jacque says eight other states already do this.

"That could be potentially huge, because right now, the kits that are sent down are kind of prioritized," Bouressa says. "And so sometimes we have cases where it takes months to get back the results."

The bill also requires rape kits to be stored for 50 years.

Survivors must be notified in writing 60 days before evidence in a kit is destroyed.

"I think that's critical in terms of giving them that opportunity to come forward, or at least that awareness or the possibility of starting criminal proceedings," Sen. Jacque says.

Bouressa says, "A lot of what we do to help victims, especially in Brown County, is best practice, and it's what we decided would be best for victims. So putting it in law is really a big deal to ensure that victims, every victim, not only in Brown County, but everywhere in the state, are afforded these same rights."

Jacque anticipates introducing the Survivor Bill of Rights in June.

If you or someone you know is a victim of sex assault,

Here are the items in the Survivors Bill of Rights (as provided by Sen. Jacque's office):

- The right to be provided with accurate written information about his or her rights as a sexual assault victim.
- The right to choose whether or not to undergo a sexual assault forensic examination.
- The right to bathe immediately following a sexual assault forensic examination if facilities are available.
- The right to choose whether or not to cooperate with a law enforcement agency.
- The right to have any examination evidence stored for 50 years or until the end of the prison term of the person convicted of the assault against him or her.
- The right to be notified in writing 60 days prior to the destruction of any evidence obtained in a sexual assault forensic examination.
- The right of an individual cooperating with law enforcement to have their sexual assault kit tested within 90 days of collection.



## Testimony for SB 43

Rise is a national nonprofit organization responsible for the Sexual Assault Survivors Bill of Rights Act, passed unanimously by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in 2016.

We advocate for the rights within the federal law to be passed on the state level. Please find below written testimony in support of SB 43 from survivors and allies within the Rise community

### Amanda Nguyen

My name is Amanda Nguyen. On the day that I was raped, I never could have imagined that a greater injustice awaited me than the one I had already been forced to endure. As a child, I had learned to believe in the well-worn credos of our legal system—that we all had access to justice, that our civil rights were sacrosanct, and that everyone was equal under law. But in the wake of my assault, I came to understand just how hollow those words can feel to a survivor seeking justice and compassion.

In the course of pursuing my own case, I ran into roadblock after roadblock—and discovered that my path was all too familiar to millions of Americans. Forensic evidence sitting on shelves, never to be tested. Rape kits destroyed before they could be brought forth as evidence. Copies of vital medical records and police reports denied. Shortfalls and irregularities in every state; symptoms of a broken promise that has left far too many survivors—already reeling from one betrayal—feeling powerless, invisible, betrayed for a second time.

I refused to be invisible—so I charted a new path. I rewrote the law, working with members of Congress, to draft a Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights. The Bill would earn the distinction of being one of the few pieces of legislation passed unanimously by Congress in recent memory. More importantly, it codified a set of basic, comprehensive civil rights for more than 25 million rape survivors across the country.

Though I never imagined the challenges I would face after my assault, nor did I imagine the power, the progress, and the hope that would arise from my ordeal. I created a non-profit called Rise to teach other survivors how to pen their own rights into existence—and to carry our success in Congress out into the fifty states, where most rape cases are adjudicated. To date, our team has worked with local survivors to secure the passage of over 45 laws, with more on the way. Because most rape cases are adjudicated in state courts it is necessary for these rights to be passed on to state by state level in the United States. I ask each of you sitting here today to help bring justice to survivors in Wisconsin. I ask that you understand the incredible movement we have created together and that through our shared common humanity we can make a difference across not only America.

Access to justice is a necessary prerequisite to true peace. Their lives are the invisible war zones that



corrode human potential and hold back the promise of a just world. Their powerlessness is our shame. This is a peace that we all - legislator, citizen, advocate from any corner of the globe - can help deliver. We can hold a light up to this darkest corner of human experience, and allow survivors at last to be seen, to be heard, to be believed, to be empowered.

## **Evan Bonsall**

Chair Wanggaard, Vice Chair Jacque, and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety,

I am testifying in writing today in favor of Senate Bill 43. Sexual assault is a crisis in Wisconsin – whether you know it or not, at least one of your loved ones is a survivor of sexual assault. 1.8 million Wisconsinites have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, including 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men. Nationwide, hospital visits related to sexual assault have increased 1,533% since 2006, and the rate of sexual assault has been rising even more rapidly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And yet, basic civil rights are too often not guaranteed for survivors of sexual assault in Wisconsin. Instead, survivors are often left to navigate a confusing system without the rights and support that they need. One of the most pressing problems facing sexual assault survivors in Wisconsin is the length of time that it takes for state crime laboratories to process sexual assault forensic evidence kits. Senate Bill 43, recently introduced by Senator André Jacque, would require that, when survivors have consented to analysis, their sexual assault kits will be processed in 90 days or less. This common-sense legislation will establish a reasonable and achievable timeline for the Wisconsin state crime laboratories to process sexual assault kits, helping provide sexual assault survivors with the justice they deserve in a timely manner.

When I was in college, I became active as a volunteer advocate for survivors' rights because sexual violence had impacted the lives of so many of my friends and family members, both on and off campus. As a public high school teacher, I also know that, according to the CDC, 1 in 5 of my female students have experienced sexual violence in the last year alone, and I want my state-level elected officials to fight to protect and support my students. I am thrilled that SB 43 is receiving a hearing before this esteemed committee, and I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. Protections for sexual assault survivors in Wisconsin are needed now more than ever before, and it is within your power to ensure that survivors can get the justice and support they deserve in our state.

Evan Bonsall  
RISE Volunteer Advocate  
Madison, WI 53703

## **Sabrina**



It's been eight years since I came forward about my sexual assault but I can still remember every detail like it was yesterday. I was 18 walking into the police station lost, scared, hurt, confused, and feeling so alone.

For 8 months a person of authority, my instructor of the fire academy I was in sexually, physically, mentally, and emotionally abused me. I thought I would tell the police what happened and everything would go back to normal but that was the case. My life has been forever changed because of this and the process of coming forward.

For months I would be dragged all around giving statements, writing down what happened, being doubted, bullied, and going to many different doctor appointments. Then court began and that was dragged out for almost a year. I was no longer being physically hurt but was having to constantly relive my worst days over and over again.

Having DNA evidence from a sexual assault collected and analyzed in a fast and timely manner and not held for months or even sometimes years or having evidence thrown away, would have made my whole case a different outcome and would've allowed the process to move along faster causing less trauma and allowing more time to begin the healing process.

Passing this bill will guarantee that survivors of sexual assault have their forensic evidence collected in a timely manner and will make the process just a bit faster and smoother so they can begin to process and heal.

## **Amanda W**

In the early morning hours of April 11, 2008, I was raped after a night of partying with friends. I came from a conservative Catholic family and had grown up hearing messages about victims "asking for it" by consuming alcohol, wearing a short skirt, any number of imagined offenses which I was taught to believe somehow justified the violation of another's body in the most intimate and horrific way possible. So, because of my upbringing and the fear that I would be blamed for what happened, I didn't go to the hospital or report my rape to the police. I genuinely believed I had brought it on myself.

After initial medical attention, I struggled silently until over a year later when I finally disclosed to my longtime nurse practitioner. She responded with immense compassion and concern, encouraged me to get into counseling, and regularly checked in with me for the rest of the duration of our patient-provider relationship.

Over the course of the subsequent years I began volunteering with the RAINN Online Hotline in the hopes that I could keep someone else from feeling as alone as I had felt. I wanted every patient to have the same positive, life-changing experience that my nurse practitioner provided



for me. Today, I'm the Program Services Coordinator at my local domestic violence agency. I love my work immensely, but one of the most difficult parts is seeing my clients struggle to navigate a legal system which often does not serve their needs in the way that it should. Hardly anything is easy or straightforward, and often it seems like it's one thing after the other for my clients.

I know how long that 20 minutes waiting for a HIV test feels -- I can only imagine the stress and anxiety of having a rape kit languish on an unidentified shelf, unable to track its status, whether it has been tested, or even if it exists anymore (as some state laws allow the kits to be destroyed after as little as 30 days). I can't imagine constantly just WAITING for the phone to ring -- have they tested the kit? Did they find the perpetrator? And if so, what comes next? I've seen the struggles faced by survivors I spoke with through both RAINN and at the DV agency, and I am moved to make things better for them. In many cases, they do everything they are "supposed" to do and still do not receive justice. We tell them to report it, to go to the ER, to do all these hard, retraumatizing things, and then after they do it we do not give them the support or resolution that they need.

SB 14 is taking a common sense, straightforward approach to removing some of the roadblocks that should never have existed in the first place. What we put survivors through is completely unacceptable, it must be fixed, and I want to be a part of the solution.

## **Allison H.**

In 2015, I was sexually assaulted by a man I was dating. As I tried to wrap my head around my trauma, I experienced a plethora of conflicting emotions, and though contacting the authorities occurred to me, justice ultimately seemed untenable. I wanted to enlist the prosecutorial support of the justice system, but was silenced by how few basic protections exist for someone like me. I was deeply aware that my case rendered itself as she-said-he-said, and I couldn't imagine pursuing a long road of interrogation and accusation.

On top of everything, I felt shame and guilt for not coming forward. My assailant was free to attack another as I abandoned other potential casualties instead of doing whatever I could to halt future victimization. But I simply could not fathom how legal action would make any difference.

After some time and a lot of healing, I turned my focus towards what I could do to make a difference--ensuring other survivors have their civil rights protected. As a survivor, I deeply understand that we all deserve the same rights no matter where the crime took place.

After my assault, I had a hard time figuring out what protections I would be afforded. Had I known that I would have had my forensic evidence tested and analyzed in a timely manner, I would have felt like the law was on my side. I would have felt protected from further traumatization. But this information was not readily available to me. Survivors are left to navigate a confusing and opaque law enforcement and judicial system on their own -- while at their most vulnerable. SB 43 ensures that survivors of sexual



assault will have the support of the criminal justice system that I never did. Please pass this bill. Thank you.





**DAVE MURPHY**  
State Representative • 56th Assembly District

May 10, 2023

Chairman Wanggaard and members of the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety.

Thank you for holding a hearing today on **Senate Bill 43**, the Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors Act. This bill would place a time limit on the processing of sexual assault kits.

Senator Jacque and I are reintroducing the Justice for Sexual Assault Survivors Act to require the Department of Justice to test the sexual assault kit of a victim who consents to its analysis within 90 days of collection by law enforcement, in order to provide information to investigators, assist in providing closure to survivors, and prevent a future backlog of untested kits from occurring for victims pursuing justice. This legislation was introduced last session as 2021 SB 814 with the formal support of the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN) and the Joyful Heart Foundation. It is also a component of the Wisconsin Sexual Abuse Survivors' Bill of Rights legislation developed in coordination with the sexual assault survivor non-profit Rise and passed within legislation by the State Assembly in February 2020.

With the enactment of 2021 Wisconsin Act 116, pre-existing protocols for local law enforcement submission of sexual assault kits to DOJ are now codified into state statute. Even with this positive step, Wisconsin, unlike several states, unfortunately remains without a testing requirement for sexual assault kits in state possession where a survivor of sexual assault consents to the analysis. According to Brown County Sexual Assault Center's Samantha Bouressa, this is important, "Because right now, the kits that are sent down are kind of prioritized. And so sometimes we have cases where it takes months to get back the results."

Eight states, including our neighbor Michigan, as well as the District of Columbia already have a statutory requirement that sexual assault kits must be processed by at least 90 days from collection. Connecticut and Kentucky have 60 day testing requirement and Massachusetts has a 30 day testing requirement.

I strongly encourage the committee to advance this bill and help the survivors of sexual assault. Thank you for your time and consideration.



May 2nd, 2023

The Honorable Senator André Jacque  
Room 7 South State Capitol PO Box 7882  
Madison, WI 53707

Honorable Senator Jacque,

The Joyful Heart Foundation strongly supports your bill, Senate Bill 43, which would ensure the swift testing of every rape kit, take dangerous offenders off the street, and bring justice to survivors. Current Wisconsin law does not require a lab kit testing timeline, leaving it to the lab's discretion. To date, 19 states and Washington, D.C. have required state crime labs to test rape kits within a certain time frame by law. With SB43, Wisconsin is poised to join these states.

Every 68 seconds, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States. Each year, there are more than 2,200 rapes reported in Wisconsin. In the immediate aftermath, a victim may choose to undergo a medical forensic examination—which can take four to six hours—to collect DNA evidence left behind by the attacker in what is commonly called a rape kit. When tested, this evidence can identify an unknown assailant, reveal serial offenders, and exonerate the wrongfully convicted. Too often, however, rape kits are left untested on evidence room shelves.

Take this case for example. On September 2, 2022, Tennessee resident Eliza Fletcher was murdered by a dangerous man with a long history of criminal activity, which started at 11 years old and included theft, burglary, aggravated assault, aggravated robbery, aggravated kidnapping, and rape. One year before Eliza's killing, another victim was raped by him. Police did not take her case seriously and her rape kit sat in a queue for about a year, gathering dust. If this case had been prioritized and the rape kit had been tested swiftly, Eliza would be alive today. SB43 would require rape kit testing timelines, ensuring that newly collected rape kits are tested expeditiously across the state, preventing future crimes.

Unequivocally, swiftly testing rape kits solves crimes. By testing every kit connected to a reported crime, more DNA profiles will be in local, state and national databases, potentially revealing serial rapists. Recent research has shown serial rapists assault both acquaintances and strangers, and often commit multiple crimes from burglary to homicide. In Eliza Fletcher's case, the offender had committed an acquaintance rape a year earlier. Testing that kit would have saved Eliza's life. Even more, testing every rape kit sends a message to survivors that they—and their cases—matter and to perpetrators that we will use every tool to bring them to accountability.

**Testing rape kits also saves communities millions of dollars.** According to a study from the Begun Center for Violence Prevention Research and Education at Case Western Reserve University, testing 4,300 previously unsubmitted kits in Cleveland has **saved the community \$38.7 million dollars**, or \$8,893 per tested sexual assault kit. Another study showed that processing every rape kit could be one of

the most effective uses of state funds. Testing backlogged rape kits can produce an astounding **65,000% return on investment**.

By mandating all rape kits submitted to laboratories to be swiftly tested, SB43 provides a critical step toward comprehensive rape kit reform in Wisconsin.

We also suggest Wisconsin enact legislation to grant victims of sexual assault the right to know the status and location of their kit. While the state currently has a tracking system where some survivors can access this information, it is still critical that survivors have these rights explicitly in statute. There may be survivors who do not or can not access the tracking system; some may want to call or walk into a precinct to obtain this information. Enacting this legislation will allow these victims to access information about their kit in the manner that is best for them. Currently, 31 states give victims this right in statute, we urge the state to become the 32nd to do so.

The Joyful Heart Foundation thanks you for your efforts and leadership on this issue. We stand ready to assist you in creating safer communities and offering a path to healing and justice to all sexual assault survivors in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Ilse Knecht

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ilse Knecht".

Director, Policy and Advocacy  
Joyful Heart Foundation  
(212) 475-2026  
[i.knecht@joyfulheartfoundation.org](mailto:i.knecht@joyfulheartfoundation.org)

**From:** Flannery Houston <[fhouston@risenow.us](mailto:fhouston@risenow.us)>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 9, 2023 4:50 PM  
**To:** Sen.Wanggaard <[Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sen.Wanggaard@legis.wisconsin.gov)>  
**Subject:** SB 43: Safeguard the Rights of Sexual Assault Survivors in WI

Chairman Wanggaard,

By way of introduction, my name is Flannery Houston and I am the Director of Programs with Rise, a nonprofit organization that advocates for the civil rights of sexual assault survivors.

I understand that SB 43 will be heard today in the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety. This bill will provide survivors with timely analysis of their forensic medical evidence.

As a survivor of sexual assault myself, SB 43 is near and dear to my heart and will be incredibly impactful to the 1.8 million survivors of sexual assault in Wisconsin.

In 2016 we fought for and unanimously passed the Sexual Assault Survivor Rights Act (Pub.L. 114–236) through the United States Congress. In 2022, we fought for and passed the Survivors Bill of Rights in the States Act as a part of the NDAA to help provide financial incentives to states who pass the rights included in the aforementioned law. These federal laws impact at least 25 million rape survivors, but it is only the beginning. These rights must be codified in individual statehouses, as most sexual assaults are adjudicated in state courts under state law. While we have passed similar laws in 40 states including Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, and most recently in Mississippi, Alabama, Montana and Tennessee, it is our goal to pass these rights in all 50 states.

Ensuring that a survivor's evidence is analyzed within 90 days will go a long way towards bringing balance to the criminal justice system for survivors and ensuring that they remain well informed and supported throughout the criminal justice process. On behalf of the more than 1.8 million survivors in Wisconsin, we hope that you will **vote yes on SB 43**, and consider advancing this bill to make it the next Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights passed into law. I have attached below for your consideration a few stories that survivors have shared with us that speak directly to the impact that this bill would have.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if there is anything else I can do to help see this bill passed.

Best Regards,  
Flannery Houston

--  
Flannery Houston  
*She Her Hers*  
Director of Programs  
Rise  
[www.risenow.us](http://www.risenow.us)





## Testimony for SB 43

Rise is a national nonprofit organization responsible for the Sexual Assault Survivors Bill of Rights Act, passed unanimously by Congress and signed into law by President Obama in 2016.

We advocate for the rights within the federal law to be passed on the state level. Please find below written testimony in support of SB 43 from survivors and allies within the Rise community

### **Amanda Nguyen**

My name is Amanda Nguyen. On the day that I was raped, I never could have imagined that a greater injustice awaited me than the one I had already been forced to endure. As a child, I had learned to believe in the well-worn credos of our legal system—that we all had access to justice, that our civil rights were sacrosanct, and that everyone was equal under law. But in the wake of my assault, I came to understand just how hollow those words can feel to a survivor seeking justice and compassion.

In the course of pursuing my own case, I ran into roadblock after roadblock—and discovered that my path was all too familiar to millions of Americans. Forensic evidence sitting on shelves, never to be tested. Rape kits destroyed before they could be brought forth as evidence. Copies of vital medical records and police reports denied. Shortfalls and irregularities in every state; symptoms of a broken promise that has left far too many survivors—already reeling from one betrayal—feeling powerless, invisible, betrayed for a second time.

I refused to be invisible—so I charted a new path. I rewrote the law, working with members of Congress, to draft a Sexual Assault Survivors' Bill of Rights. The Bill would earn the distinction of being one of the few pieces of legislation passed unanimously by Congress in recent memory. More importantly, it codified a set of basic, comprehensive civil rights for more than 25 million rape survivors across the country.

Though I never imagined the challenges I would face after my assault, nor did I imagine the power, the progress, and the hope that would arise from my ordeal. I created a non-profit called Rise to teach other survivors how to pen their own rights into existence—and to carry our success in Congress out into the fifty states, where most rape cases are adjudicated. To date, our team has worked with local survivors to secure the passage of over 45 laws, with more on the way. Because most rape cases are adjudicated in state courts it is necessary for these rights to be passed on to state by state level in the United States. I ask each of you sitting here today to help bring justice to survivors in Wisconsin. I ask that you understand the incredible movement we have created together and that through our shared common humanity we can make a difference across not only America.

Access to justice is a necessary prerequisite to true peace. Their lives are the invisible war zones that



corrode human potential and hold back the promise of a just world. Their powerlessness is our shame. This is a peace that we all - legislator, citizen, advocate from any corner of the globe - can help deliver. We can hold a light up to this darkest corner of human experience, and allow survivors at last to be seen, to be heard, to be believed, to be empowered.

## **Evan Bonsall**

Chair Wanggaard, Vice Chair Jacque, and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety,

I am testifying in writing today in favor of Senate Bill 43. Sexual assault is a crisis in Wisconsin – whether you know it or not, at least one of your loved ones is a survivor of sexual assault. According to 1.8 million Wisconsinites have experienced sexual violence in their lifetime, including 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men. Nationwide, hospital visits related to sexual assault have increased 1,533% since 2006, and the rate of sexual assault has been rising even more rapidly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

And yet, basic civil rights are too often not guaranteed for survivors of sexual assault in Wisconsin. Instead, survivors are often left to navigate a confusing system without the rights and support that they need. One of the most pressing problems facing sexual assault survivors in Wisconsin is the length of time that it takes for state crime laboratories to process sexual assault forensic evidence kits. Senate Bill 43, recently introduced by Senator André Jacque, would require that, when survivors have consented to analysis, their sexual assault kits will be processed in 90 days or less. This common-sense legislation will establish a reasonable and achievable timeline for the Wisconsin state crime laboratories to process sexual assault kits, and helping provide sexual assault survivors with the justice they deserve in a timely manner.

When I was in college, I became active as a volunteer advocate for survivors' rights because sexual violence had impacted the lives of so many of my friends and family members, both on and off campus. As a public high school teacher, I also know that, according to the CDC, 1 in 5 of my female students have experienced sexual violence in the last year alone, and I want my state-level elected officials to fight to protect and support my students. I am thrilled that SB 43 is receiving a hearing before this esteemed committee, and I greatly appreciate your time and consideration. Protections for sexual assault survivors in Wisconsin are needed now more than ever before, and it is within your power to ensure that more survivors can get the justice and support they deserve in our state.

Evan Bonsall  
RISE Volunteer Advocate  
Madison, WI 53703

## **Sabrina**

It's been eight years since I came forward about my sexual assault but I can still remember every detail like it was yesterday. I was 18 walking into the police station lost, scared, hurt, confused, and feeling so alone.





For 8 months a person of authority, my instructor of the fire academy I was in sexually, physically, mentally, and emotionally abused me. I thought I would tell the police what happened and everything would go back to normal but that was the case. My life has been forever changed because of this and the process of coming forward.

For months I would be dragged all around giving statements, writing down what happened, being doubted, bullied, and going to many different doctor appointments. Then court began and that was dragged out for almost a year. I was no longer being physically hurt but was having to constantly relive my worst days over and over again.

Having DNA evidence from a sexual assault collected and analyzed in a fast and timely manner and not held for months or even sometimes years or having evidence thrown away, would have made my whole case a different outcome and would've allowed the process to move along faster causing less trauma and allowing more time to begin the healing process.

Passing this bill will guarantee that survivors of sexual assault have their forensic evidence collected in a timely manner and will make the process just a bit faster and smoother so they can begin to process and heal.

## **Amanda W**

In the early morning hours of April 11, 2008, I was raped after a night of partying with friends. I came from a conservative Catholic family and had grown up hearing messages about victims "asking for it" by consuming alcohol, wearing a short skirt, any number of imagined offenses which I was taught to believe somehow justified the violation of another's body in the most intimate and horrific way possible. So, because of my upbringing and the fear that I would be blamed for what happened, I didn't go to the hospital or report my rape to the police. I genuinely believed I had brought it on myself.

After initial medical attention, I struggled silently until over a year later when I finally disclosed to my longtime nurse practitioner. She responded with immense compassion and concern, encouraged me to get into counseling, and regularly checked in with me for the rest of the duration of our patient-provider relationship.

Over the course of the subsequent years I began volunteering with the RAINN Online Hotline in the hopes that I could keep someone else from feeling as alone as I had felt. I wanted every patient to have the same positive, life-changing experience that my nurse practitioner provided for me. Today, I'm the Program Services Coordinator at my local domestic violence agency. I love my work immensely, but one of the most difficult parts is seeing my clients struggle to navigate a legal system which often does not serve their needs in the way that it should. Hardly



anything is easy or straightforward, and often it seems like it's one thing after the other for my clients.

I know how long that 20 minutes waiting for a HIV test feels -- I can only imagine the stress and anxiety of having a rape kit languish on an unidentified shelf, unable to track its status, whether it has been tested, or even if it exists anymore (as some state laws allow the kits to be destroyed after as little as 30 days). I can't imagine constantly just WAITING for the phone to ring -- have they tested the kit? Did they find the perpetrator? And if so, what comes next? I've seen the struggles faced by survivors I spoke with through both RAINN and at the DV agency, and I am moved to make things better for them. In many cases, they do everything they are "supposed" to do and still do not receive justice. We tell them to report it, to go to the ER, to do all these hard, retraumatizing things, and then after they do it we do not give them the support or resolution that they need.

SB 14 is taking a common sense, straightforward approach to removing some of the roadblocks that should never have existed in the first place. What we put survivors through is completely unacceptable, it must be fixed, and I want to be a part of the solution.

## **Allison H.**

In 2015, I was sexually assaulted by a man I was dating. As I tried to wrap my head around my trauma, I experienced a plethora of conflicting emotions, and though contacting the authorities occurred to me, justice ultimately seemed untenable. I wanted to enlist the prosecutorial support of the justice system, but was silenced by how few basic protections exist for someone like me. I was deeply aware that my case rendered itself as she-said-he-said, and I couldn't imagine pursuing a long road of interrogation and accusation.

On top of everything, I felt shame and guilt for not coming forward. My assailant was free to attack another as I abandoned other potential casualties instead of doing whatever I could to halt future victimization. But I simply could not fathom how legal action would make any difference.

After some time and a lot of healing, I turned my focus towards what I could do to make a difference--ensuring other survivors have their civil rights protected. As a survivor, I deeply understand that we all deserve the same rights no matter where the crime took place.

After my assault, I had a hard time figuring out what protections I would be afforded. Had I known that I would have had my forensic evidence tested and analyzed in a timely manner, I would have felt like the law was on my side. I would have felt protected from further traumatization. But this information was not readily available to me. Survivors are left to navigate a confusing and opaque law enforcement and judicial system on their own -- while at their most vulnerable. SB 43 ensures that survivors of sexual assault will have the support of the criminal justice system that I never did. Please pass this bill. Thank you.