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**For Immediate Release**

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## **District Attorney Summer Stephan Provides Update on Rape Kit Testing, Connects Victims with Test Status**

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) today announced a new mechanism for victims to request information about the testing status of their sexual assault evidence kits. Earlier this year, the District Attorney's Office, working with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department, proactively contracted with a highly-respected, internationally accredited, private DNA lab to test approximately 1,000 untested sexual assault evidence kits in order to identify offenders who may potentially be linked to other sexual assaults. As of today, 350 rape kits have been sent to the lab for testing and the first results are expected by the end of April, DA Summer Stephan said

Reducing the countywide backlog of untested sexual assault kits has been a top priority of San Diego County District Attorney Summer Stephan since taking office in July of 2017. For this reason, with the support of San Diego County's Chief Administrative Officer, DA Stephan has provided District Attorney Office funds to expedite testing. The District Attorney's Office has retained laboratory Bode Cellmark Forensics, of Lorton, Virginia, which has extensive experience testing SART kits.

"Protecting victims of sexual assault and leveraging every tool to bring their abusers to justice has been my mission for over a decade," said District Attorney Summer Stephan. "About 80 percent of rapes are committed by someone in the victim's circle and it's likely the perpetrator will continue to commit sexual assaults. Having personally prosecuted rape cases that left victims with deep emotional and physical wounds and having seen how much bringing their perpetrators to justice matters, I'm committed to doing everything we can to solve their cases. That's why I've prioritized the testing of rape kits, including those committed by known perpetrators, and worked so hard to identify funding and get the process moving as quickly as possible. The kits may contain powerful evidence that can speak on behalf of victims and prevent a future assault."

Of the untested kits, about 400 are Sheriff's investigations and the other roughly 600 kits are from eight other police agencies in the region (excluding the San Diego Police Department.)

“It is our priority to hold offenders accountable in all criminal cases,” said Sheriff Gore. “Each of these kits represents a survivor and it is our goal to match them with information about their cases. This program is the next step in that process and a way to further the identification of offenders in other sexual assault investigations.”

If you were the victim of a sexual assault and are interested in knowing the status of the DNA test related to your kit, we can connect you with an investigator. In order to facilitate requests, the Sheriff’s Department has established a phone number and an email address where individuals can leave current contact information. The phone number is (858) 514-4661; the email address is [KitTestResults@sdsheriff.org](mailto:KitTestResults@sdsheriff.org). Both the phone number and email account can also be found on the Sheriff’s Department web page: [www.SDSheriff.net](http://www.SDSheriff.net).

The information required includes the victim’s name at the time of the assault, contact information, the jurisdiction where the crime took place, the date of the incident and a case number (if known, or other case identifiers) so individuals can be partnered with the appropriate investigator. All information provided to the Sheriff’s Department is confidential and will only be used to locate a case and to continue any follow-up related to that case.

The San Diego-based Center for Community Solutions, which has a mission to end relationship and sexual violence by being a catalyst for caring communities and social justice, voiced support of the DA’s initiative. “It’s important to all of us to have the backlog of rape kits tested in cases where survivors have provided consent for the testing,” said Verna Griffin-Tabor, CEO and Executive Director of the Center for Community Solutions.

The [Joyful Heart Foundation](#), which is working to have all rape kits tested in the U.S., strongly supports San Diego’s testing initiative and the County’s focus on delivering justice for victims. A representative from the Joyful Heart Foundation appeared with District Attorney Summer Stephan at a news conference updating the public on the testing of rape kits.

"We are honored to stand with District Attorney Summer Stephan today as her office actively pursues justice for survivors of sexual assault who have waited far too long for clarity around the status of their rape kits. The rape kit backlog represents a failure of the criminal justice system to protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable. We can and must do better," said Ilse Knecht, Director of Policy and Advocacy for the Joyful Heart Foundation, a leading national organization working to eliminate the rape kit backlog through their End the Backlog initiative. "When jurisdictions like San Diego test every kit, they solve crimes, bring answers and a path to justice for survivors, take criminals off the streets, and exonerate the innocent. But access to justice should not depend on a survivor's zip code within California. That is why we are working with California state legislators to pass SB 1449 and AB 1138, which will fundamentally change the way California handles sexual assault kits, by mandating the first statewide inventory and the testing of all newly collected rape kits."

April is Sexual Assault Prevention Month. Every 98 seconds, someone is sexually assaulted in the United States. It takes a tremendous amount of courage for survivors of sexual assaults to come forward. Victims in San Diego County can be assured that law enforcement is invested in helping them achieve justice and hopefully a sense of healing after enduring such a traumatic experience.

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**About the San Diego County District Attorney's Office**

*The San Diego County DA's Office prosecutes all felony crimes in the county and misdemeanor crimes committed outside the City of San Diego. The office files about 40,000 criminal cases a year and balances prosecution with numerous crime prevention programs. District Attorney Summer Stephan leads the office of more than 1,000 dedicated employees who pursue justice and support victims daily across San Diego County. DA Summer Stephan has devoted her life to protecting children and families and providing justice to the voiceless and most vulnerable. She is a national leader in the fight against sexual exploitation and human trafficking, and has served as a Deputy District Attorney in San Diego County for 28 years.*