

## **Governor's Sexual Assault Kit Working Group (SAKWG)**

### **June 10, 2016 Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Laura Cordes, Guy Vallaro, Anne Mahoney, Linda Cimino

Members Absent: Cathy Malloy, Maureen Platt, Chief Keith Mello

Guests: Eleanor Michael (Gov. Malloy's office), Kevin MacMillan (SAKI program coordinator)

#### **I. Welcome and Introductions**

Ms. Cordes, SAKWG chair, welcomed members and reviewed agenda.

Members introduce themselves, including guest Kevin MacMillan, SAKI Grant Coordinator for Connecticut.

Ms. Cordes noted that it is expected that the Governor will replace the two previously appointed members (Barbara O'Connor and Carolyn Treiss) who are no longer in their positions with the state.

#### **II. Purpose and Focus of Group**

Ms. Cordes noted that the focus of the group was to address the unsubmitted and untested kits that were identified last year in the survey of police departments. Ms. Cordes shared resource binders with background materials and state kit numbers for each member.

Since the group was announced the state has received a federal BJA Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) three year grant to support the effort of testing kits, pursuing cases and supporting victims. The group discussed serving as the multidisciplinary group called for under the grant. Based on the grant document, it appears that it can serve in this capacity. Dr. Vallaro and Mr. MacMillan supported this conclusion.

#### **III. Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) Grant**

Mr. MacMillan provided an update to the group on the SAKI grant. He indicated that the main objective would be to have a coordinated community response. The grant requires another survey to be conducted. (This is in addition to the one conducted in 2015) Also, there needs to be a way to have an inventory of kits so they can be tracked.

Under the SAKI grant, the multidisciplinary group's objectives are:

- Assess the training needs, and conduct cross disciplinary training in relation to kits collection, DNA technology, victimization, investigation and other needs
- Establish victim-centered protocols for victim engagement, notification, and support
- Identify what contributed to, and continues to drive unsubmitted kits
- Develop processes for tracking and sharing critical data
- Ensure that the composition includes all parties, including law enforcement, SAFEs, Victim Advocates, and prosecutors.

Dr. Vallaro noted that it may be prudent to fast-track the communications piece to ensure that victims are shielded from as much –re-traumatization as possible as a result of late notifications arising from delayed kit testing, as testing of the kits is now under way. Ms. Cordes said it was important to coordinate the notification process and indicated that The Alliance member programs are already looking at the essential elements of this process.

Mr. MacMillan and Ms. Cordes will attend the SAKI Grantee meeting in DC for new and current grantees on June 12 & 13 and share information with members at the next meeting.

### III. Lab Update on Testing on Previously Unsubmitted Kits

Mr. MacMillan shared some data with the group. As of April 2015, 751 kits had been submitted to the lab for testing, 83 of which were anonymous. Since the kits have no unique identifiers on them, the assumption is that these are the same kits that police reported. Of the 751 kits, 210 have been tested (not sure as of when), with 58 profiles being put into CODIS (Combined DNA Index System) to determine if any foreign (not victim) DNA was present. There were 16 CODIS "hits." Of the 16 two (2) were forensic (meaning that the foreign DNA was from an offender already in the "system" for sexual assault. The kits will continue to be tested.

Some discussion ensued regarding the likelihood of annual surveys of police department kit inventories. There was agreement that law enforcement should know in advance that they will be asked for this information. The first survey will begin in fall 2016, according to Mr. MacMillan.

Dr. Vallaro is considering sending a letter to indicate that the state has the SAKI grant and that an additional request for the number of unsubmitted kits will soon be made. There was general consensus about the need ensure law enforcement engagement in the process and to clarify the process law and need for the kits to be sent to the lab.

There was discussion about the need for some sort of glossary of terms to help the group as it moves forward.

The group spent some time discussing the state versus federal DNA databases and how a particular case would end up in one or both. The main hurdle for a case to go into the federal database is that a crime must have been committed. It was agreed that it would be helpful if the group has in its possession a list of the criteria for both databases. Dr. Vallaro indicated that Connecticut actually changed its criteria for the state database to make it easier for cases to go into it. Ms. Cimino thought it might be useful to look at the criteria other states use.

### IV. Discussion

#### *Considerations for Tracking Untested Kits and Reviewing Untested Kit Case Reports*

The conversation moved to the topic of tracking cases and the best way to do that. First and foremost, any tracking system needs to include a unique identifier for kits and computer software into which the identifier is inputted. The identifier could be as simple as a barcode sticker, which would be very inexpensive.

The group discussed Michigan's use of UPS in a pilot program, which would provide a cloud version of the unique identifier. There is also the possibility of a Canadian software program that Mr. MacMillan liked. Currently, Connecticut's kits are listed on an Excel spreadsheet and all of this information could be transferred to a new tracking system. Ms. Cimino mentioned that some of the SAFE hospitals were running out of the kit, and the group agreed that any system would need to have an inventory element to ensure a constant supply of kits.

Members discussed considerations for case review associated with the unsubmitted kits and most agreed that it made sense to identify the reasons why kits were not sent to the lab and that it should be coordinated by Judicial district.

*Developing the SAKWG Timeline*

Mr. MacMillan and Ms. Cordes will meet before the next meeting to frame out a timeline for the work group.

The next meeting will be held on Friday, July 15, 2-4 , Location TBD. For the next meeting, the group will review and develop a timeline, including project goals, as well as a plan for determining training needs. Time will be set aside for a primer on DNA testing basics.

The meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Cohen,

SAKWG Administrator, Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence