

Keynote

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JOYFUL
HEART
FOUNDATION

ENDING THE RAPE KIT BACKLOG


ILSE KNECHT | November 2022

RAPE KIT BACKLOG

- **Every 68 seconds**, someone is sexually assaulted in the U.S.
- Survivors may choose FME to have evidence collected
- Testing expected to identify and apprehend offender
- All too often not tested
- Kits and cases shelved

HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

- Failure to take sexual assault seriously
- Lack of written policies and protocols
- Bias, prejudice
- Victim blaming
- Knowledge gaps
- Disbelief
- Lab policies unclear or outdated
- Limited capacity

A woman with dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt, is seen from the back, looking towards a large, chaotic pile of debris and rubble. The scene is outdoors, with a clear sky and some buildings visible in the background. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent grey box containing text.

"To me, the rape kit backlog is one of the clearest and most shocking demonstrations of how we regard these crimes in our society. Testing rape kits sends a fundamental and crucial message to victims of sexual violence: you matter. What happened to you matters. Your case matters."

— Mariska Hargitay

SCOPE

- 400,000 originally estimated after NYC had 17,000 alone
- Now estimate 72,000 still on shelves
- Each kit represents a survivor
- Potentially dangerous offender

Amberly and Helena

In April 1998, **Amberly Lakes** was kidnapped in Ohio and raped at knifepoint. Her kit sat for over two years; in 2001, when state officials started testing backlogged kits, DNA analysis identified Charles Courtney.



In August 1996, **Helena Lazaro** was abducted at knifepoint and sexually assaulted. Her kit was not tested until 2003, when it also matched to Courtney. Officials did not notify her of results until 2010.



Courtney's DNA was in the database because he raped his wife.

Natasha

In 1993, **Natasha Alexenko** was raped at gunpoint in New York. Her rape kit sat on a shelf for nine years when it was tested.

In 2007, Victor Rondon was swabbed upon arrest in Las Vegas, Nevada for assaulting a police officer, triggering a DNA match to the kit.

In the intervening years, Victor Rondon went on a multi-state crime spree, collecting arrests for violent and drug-related crimes.



Randhir

In 2008, Keith Asberry kidnapped and raped two young girls at gunpoint. Their cases were ignored.

In 2014 he raped and murdered Randhir Kaur, a dental student.

The 2008 kits were finally tested in 2014 and matched to Asberry. He was finally arrested in 2015. He was connected to at least two other assaults.

If the 2008 kits had been tested, one murder and one assault could have been prevented.



Eliza

Eliza Fletcher was abducted while out jogging on September 2, 2022 near the University of Memphis campus. Her body was found three days later.

DNA found in Fletcher's case was matched to a rape kit collected on September 21, 2021, from the rape of Alicia Franklin, which was not tested until 2022, when Eliza was found.

Alicia said she was not taken seriously and was ignored by police when she reported a rape by the same man a year earlier.



IMPACT

Unsolved crime

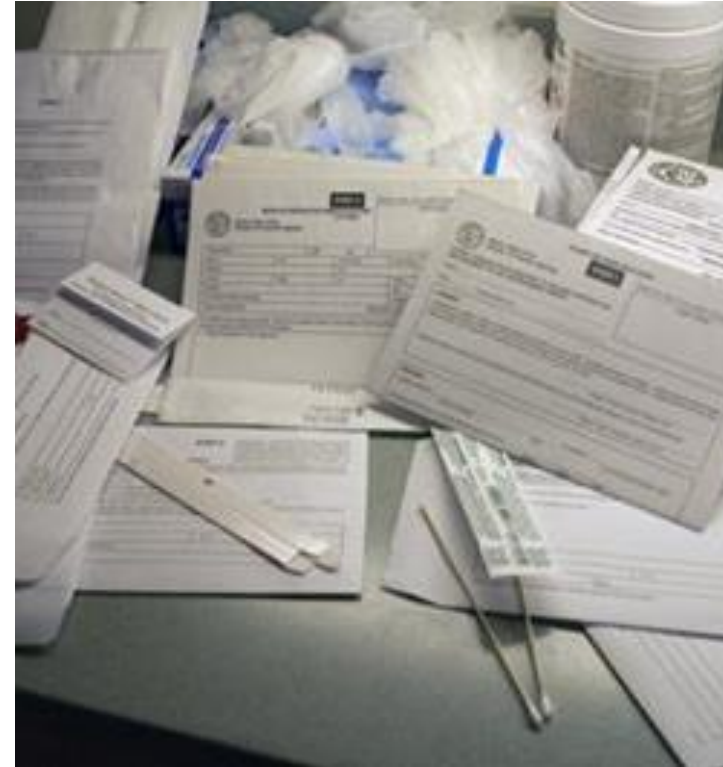
Repeat offenders

Preventable crime

Lives derailed and destroyed

STOP SERIAL RAPISTS

- **Detroit, Cleveland, and Memphis** identified more than 1,300 serial rapists
- Committed crimes **across 40 states** and **Washington, D.C.**
- Many offenders have been linked to other violent crimes



COST SAVINGS

- Saves communities money
- Cleveland ~4000 backlogged kits tested found a **net savings to the community of \$5,529 per kit.**
- Produced **\$28.5 million in savings overall**
- WV found testing can produce **65,000% return on investment**

JHF's SIX PILLARS

1. Recurring statewide inventory
2. Mandatory testing of backlogged kits
3. Mandatory testing of newly collected kits
4. Statewide tracking system
5. Victims' rights to know
6. Funding for reform

YOUR STATE?

Connecticut

Massachusetts

Texas

Hawaii

Michigan

Utah

Idaho

Montana

Virginia

Illinois

Nevada

Washington

Kentucky

New Mexico

Washington, D.C.

Maryland

Oregon

LEGALLY OWED OFFENDER SAMPLES

2022

Alaska – 20,000

Arkansas – 30,000

2021

Tennessee – 75,000

2019

Washington – 30,000

2013

Kentucky – 16,000

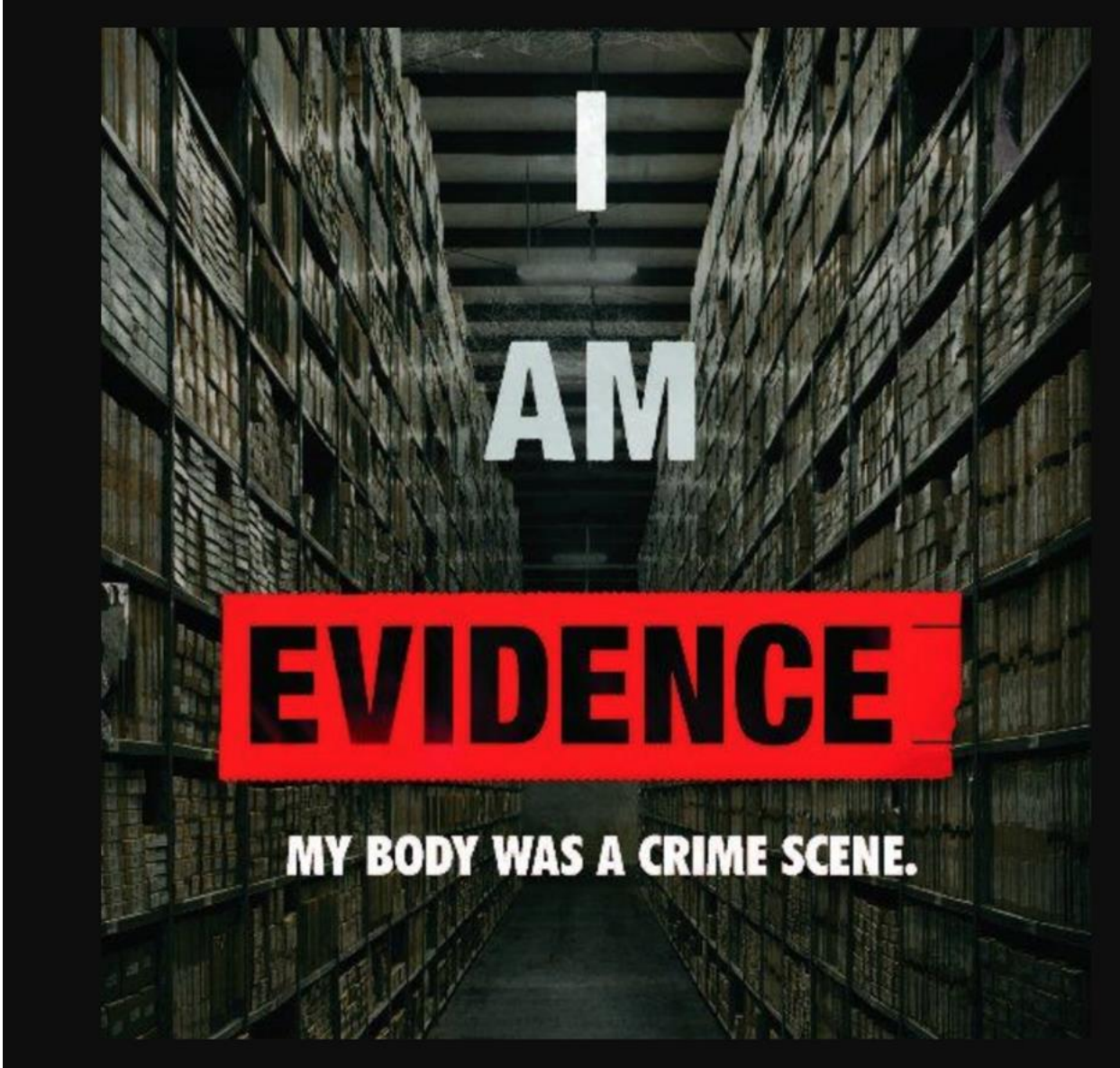
2009

Wisconsin – 12,000

Illinois – 50,000

Colorado – 2,000

Virginia – 8,400



I
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EVIDENCE

MY BODY WAS A CRIME SCENE.

Thank you!

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