

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BUDGET
HEALTH, EDUCATION,
LABOR, AND PENSIONS
HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

September 9, 2015

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
United States Attorney General
Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Attorney General Lynch,

I write to express my concerns about the continued backlog in the testing of sexual assault kits by local law enforcement agencies nationwide, including in my home State of Wisconsin, and to urge the Department of Justice to take further steps to address this continuing crisis.

Survivors of sexual assault face many physical and emotional challenges in the wake of an attack, including the difficult process of assisting law enforcement in finding and prosecuting their assailants, in many cases by using sexual assault kits to preserve DNA samples. Unfortunately, we know that many of these kits are never processed, but rather sit untested in police storage or on the shelf at a crime lab facility.

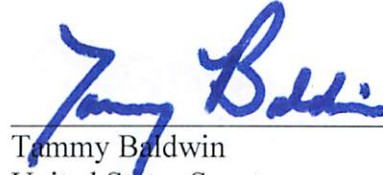
While there are no comprehensive numbers on the nature and scope of that backlog, a recent investigation of public records by *USA Today* has revealed at least 70,000 sexual assault kits remain untested nationwide, including more than 6,000 in Wisconsin. This review involved only a fraction of local law enforcement agencies, meaning the backlog is likely significantly larger.

This is simply unacceptable and the Department must more strongly fulfill the key role Congress has directed it to take in helping local law enforcement agencies address the backlog. In 2004, Congress passed the Debbie Smith Act authorizing federal grants to assist local law enforcement in the testing of backlogged DNA samples, and has twice reauthorized this law with overwhelming, bipartisan support. This year, as a member of the Appropriations Committee, I was proud to support the Fiscal Year 2016 Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, which included strong funding for the Debbie Smith Act and directed the Department of Justice to use the vast majority of this funding specifically to reduce the backlog in testing sexual assault kits.

It is critical that victims of sexual assault across the country receive the swift and thorough justice they deserve, and timely analysis of DNA evidence is one important tool in ensuring that is what they get. Today's backlog leaves victims and their families without closure and potentially puts other members of our communities at risk of sexual violence. Congress has sent

a strong message to the Department that addressing this ongoing crisis is a bipartisan priority and I urge you to take immediate steps to provide local law enforcement with resources and technical assistance that can help them eliminate the backlog as quickly as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Timmy Baldwin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Timmy" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and "Baldwin" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Timmy Baldwin
United States Senator