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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Assemblymember Nancy Skinner, CALCASA Announce Bill  
to Address California’s Rape Kit Backlog**

**OAKLAND, CA.** – Assemblymember Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley) announced legislation today with the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) and Alameda County District Attorney Nancy E. O’Malley to address the backlog of untested rape kits languishing in law enforcement agencies and forensic labs in California.

“We are here to make it clear that rape kits must be tested,” Skinner said. “To not test them is a second assault on the victim and can leave a perpetrator on the streets to offend again.”

Currently, there is no comprehensive data on the exact number of unprocessed rape kits in California. Skinner’s legislation, AB 1517, would specify timelines for testing rape kits and entering DNA profile information into the Combined DNA Index System, a national database.

Local studies provide insight into the scope of the problem. In 2008, the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department had a combined total of more than 12,000 untested rape kits in their custody. In 2012, Alameda County estimated their backlog of untested rape kits to be 1,900.

“This legislation will provide justice to survivors of sexual assault by testing evidence collected during an invasive physical examination and using that evidence to capture and prosecute their assailants,” said District Attorney O’Malley. “As District Attorney of Alameda County, I am dedicated to working with law enforcement to eliminate the rape kit backlog in this county. Our efforts must also address the backlog throughout the State and the Nation and this legislation serves as a vital step toward that goal.”

Under California law, the Sexual Assault Victims’ DNA Bill of Rights identifies DNA as a powerful tool for identifying and prosecuting sexual assault offenders. That DNA evidence, collected during a grueling four to six hour exam, is compiled in the rape kit.

“It’s such a retraumatization to be powerless to the rape itself and to be completely helpless in the system that is intended to protect and serve justice,” said Heather Marlowe, whose rape kit sat untested for *two-and-a-half-years* after being drug-raped in San Francisco on May 16, 2010. “This is a public emergency that needs to be addressed.”

At the crime lab, a DNA profile can be created, if sufficient DNA evidence is found, and uploaded into a national DNA database. While DNA can help identify unknown offenders, most sexual assaults are committed by persons *known* to the victim. Therefore, identity is not an issue in most sexual assaults. But testing rape kits in those cases is still valuable.

“It is essential to test *all* rape kits and forensic evidence, regardless if the victim knows the offender,” said Sandra Henriquez, the Executive Director of CALCASA. “Once uploaded in the national database, DNA profiles can be used to identify suspects and establish links between cases. Untested kits mean lost opportunities to provide survivors with justice.”

Since 2010, only Colorado, Illinois and Texas have enacted legislation that requires both the submission of sexual assault kits to crime labs within a time period and establishes tracking methods.

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*CALCASA is the only statewide organization in California whose sole purpose is to promote public policy, advocacy, training and technical assistance on the issue of sexual assault. CALCASA convenes statewide and national training conferences and its primary membership is composed of the 84 rape crisis centers and rape prevention programs in California. For more information, visit [www.calcasa.org](http://www.calcasa.org).*