

Project Mālama Kākou

Hawai`i Sexual Assault Kit Initiative

Thousands of sexual assault kits that were not tested for DNA have been held in police department evidence rooms across the United States, often for years. Recently, there has been a nationwide movement to test more kits.

Project Mālama Kākou was created to bring together a multidisciplinary team to comprehensively reform the testing of sexual assault kits in Hawai`i in a caring and victim-centered manner.

Hawai`i police departments have updated their procedures for the testing of sexual assault kits. Testing will no longer focus solely on individual case investigations but will also be done to assist in the possible identification of suspects across the country.

Many sexual assault kits that were collected but not tested in the past will be sent for analysis. We are strongly committed to this and to the submission of kits for testing in reported cases in the future.

Survivors may be concerned about what the testing of kits means for them. Their concerns must be handled with sensitivity and care. To address this need, Project Mālama Kākou has developed a sensitive and supportive process for notifying survivors of any positive outcomes from testing. Trained professionals will be available to talk with survivors either over the phone, via e-mail, or in person.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why weren't kits tested in the past?

Sexual assault evidence kits were not submitted for testing for a variety of reasons. These reasons may have included:

- the suspect's identity was verified by other credible means;
- corroboration or confirmation of other evidence by testing the kit was not considered necessary;
- survivor declined to participate in the case;
- technological, staffing and funding limitations.

Why test more kits now?

It is possible to test more kits now, due to the development of better DNA testing technology and best practices for addressing untested kits; expanded laboratory capacity and funding from federal, state, and local sources; and a national shift in how sexual violence is addressed.

Why not test all kits?

In the investigation and prosecution of sexual violence crimes, the needs of the reporting survivor must take priority. Sometimes survivors may report a sexual assault, but decide to not pursue the case further. This is an important exercise of their rights and should be respected. In a case where a kit was collected and a police report made but was later formally withdrawn, the kit will not automatically be tested.

Kits will not automatically be tested when the offender is a convicted felon, because a convicted felon's DNA has already been uploaded to the FBI's CODIS database.

If you think you have an untested kit and would like further information, please contact Project Mālama Kākou at email: hisaki@hawaii.gov or visit the website at: ag.hawaii.gov/hisaki

What will happen to kits that are not automatically tested?

If a kit is in storage and will not automatically be tested in the Project Mālama Kākou process, it can still be tested at the survivor's request. Survivors who would now like to have their sexual assault kit tested or possibly reinstate their previous police report, should contact Project Mālama Kākou.

What if there was no report to the police?

If a survivor had a sexual assault evidence kit collected but did not make a police report, the kit may be in storage. At a survivor's request, a police report related to that kit may still be made and the kit, if in storage, may still be submitted for testing. Survivors who had a sexual assault evidence kit collected but did not make a police report and are now interested in making a police report, should contact Project Mālama Kākou to discuss the status of their kits.

Project Mālama Kākou

(which means “We Care”) is a state plan to:

- Test untested sexual assault kits and new sexual assault kits;
- Identify the criteria for testing sexual assault kits and the order of testing;
- Provide active outreach and public notification to ensure that information and services are provided to impacted survivors; and
- Establish a tracking system for sexual assault kits

For more information, visit the Project Mālama Kākou website at ag.hawaii.gov/hisaki

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Important Definitions

Sexual Assault Evidence Kit

A package of items used by medical personnel to collect and preserve physical evidence from a person's body following a sexual assault.

Unsubmitted Sexual Assault Evidence Kit

Sexual assault evidence kits that have not been submitted to a forensic laboratory for testing with CODIS-eligible DNA methodologies.

CODIS

The Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) is a system of federal, state, and local databases that contain DNA profiles from both known offenders and crime scenes. CODIS is used to generate investigative leads.

CODIS-Hit

When a DNA profile is uploaded into CODIS and finds a matching DNA profile from a separate criminal offense or known offender, it is referred to as a “CODIS-Hit” and can be used as an investigative lead by law enforcement.

Victim-Centered Approach

A method that puts the victim at the center of decision-making regarding recovery and any involvement with the criminal justice system. The victim's choice, safety, and well-being are the focus, and the needs of the victim are everyone's concern.

***“Survivors of sexual assault must receive appropriate services.”
- Attorney General Douglas Chin***

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