



NEWS RELEASE

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Victory for Survivors: RAINN Thanks President Biden For Signing Bill to End Rape Kit Backlog

Washington, D.C. - On July 30, 2024, the reauthorization of the Debbie Smith Act 2024 was signed into law by President Biden, who was himself an original co-sponsor of the bill in 2004. Since its initial passage in 2004, funding from the Debbie Smith Act has resulted in more than 300,000 hits on CODIS, the national DNA database system.

The Debbie Smith Act addresses the backlog of rape kits in the U.S. by opening up funding for public crime laboratories to process DNA evidence from rapes and other violent crimes. This funding has aided in the arrest of violent offenders, including serial sexual offenders.

“Imagine undergoing a forensic exam in the aftermath of experiencing the trauma of sexual violence, only to have that evidence sit on a shelf,” said RAINN president and founder Scott Berkowitz. “This is the reality for too many survivors across the nation and the Debbie Smith Act has been integral in helping survivors get evidence tested and pursue justice.”

“I want to thank Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX) and Rep. Ann Wagner (R-MO-2) for their leadership and determination to renew the Debbie Smith Act and bring hope to victims of sexual violence,” said Berkowitz. “I also want to thank Debbie Smith herself, who has spent the last 25 years working hard to ensure justice for survivors. Without her efforts, this law would not exist, and many thousands of rapists would have never been identified.”

“Examining DNA evidence is a critical step in achieving justice for sexual assault survivors, but many law enforcement agencies don’t have the resources to work through the rape kit backlog in a timely manner,” said Sen. Cornyn. “This legislation will empower law enforcement to solve these heinous crimes and give survivors the closure they deserve, and I’m glad to see it become law.”

The Debbie Smith Act is the result of the tireless advocacy of its namesake, Debbie Smith, who, in 1989 was sexually assaulted by a stranger who broke into her home. Although she underwent a [sexual assault forensic exam](#), the DNA evidence went unanalyzed for over five years. In 1994, the forensic evidence was finally entered into the FBI's national database and yielded a "hit," identifying the perpetrator. He was brought to trial and eventually convicted for the rape of Debbie Smith.

"My heart is filled with gratitude!" said advocate and bill namesake Debbie Smith. "Thank you, Congress, for coming together and passing the Debbie Smith Act once again. My hope is that you understand that this legislation is one of the best when it comes to serving victims of sexual assault and other violent crimes. It responds to questions that were thought insoluble, it identifies those who would remain nameless, and it exonerates those who have been wrongly accused. This bill solves crimes from the past while working in the present and building for the future. But most of all, it offers justice, resolution, and peace for victims. That is our government working at its best! I also want to thank President Biden, who as a senator, fought hard with all of us on this legislation. It will be great to have his signature on this bill."

RAINN urges robust funding in the House and Senate appropriations bills to make this a sweeping victory for past and future survivors of sexual assault by fully funding the Debbie Smith Act.

Background on The Debbie Smith Act

At any given time, there are thousands of rape kits sitting in law enforcement evidence rooms or awaiting testing at state and local labs. These rape kits oftentimes contain the DNA of violent sexual offenders who have not yet been arrested. When these kits remain untested, perpetrators have the opportunity to re-offend in their communities. According to a 2019 study by Dr. Rebecca Campbell, 39% of sexual offenders identified in the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) were serial offenders with a range of two to 15 sexual assaults each. CODIS is a national DNA information repository managed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. This repository allows state and local laboratories to store and compare DNA profiles from crime scenes and convicted perpetrators.

The Debbie Smith Act, which RAINN has helped pass since 2004, authorizes funding for state and local crime laboratories to build capacity to analyze DNA samples. Because of this funding:

- More than 645,901 crime scene profiles were uploaded to CODIS.
- 3.6 million offender and/or arrestee samples have been uploaded to CODIS.

- As of August 2023, CODIS has produced more than 674,405 hits assisting in more than 656,893 investigations.
- Importantly, funding provided through the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program was responsible for 313,900 of those CODIS “hits”.

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About RAINN

[RAINN](#), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, help organizations improve their sexual assault prevention and response programs, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence, free, confidential help is available 24/7 by calling 800.656.HOPE (4673) or visiting hotline.rainn.org.

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