

**Resolution of the Zonta Club of Tallahassee
Regarding the
Processing of Sexual Offense Examination Kits
January 19, 2016**

Whereas; Zonta International is a leading global organization of professionals empowering women worldwide through service and advocacy; and

Whereas; the mission of Zonta includes improving the legal, political, economic, educational, health and professional status of women at the global and local level through service and advocacy; and

Whereas; Zonta International, its districts and its clubs are nonsectarian and nonpartisan; and

Whereas; “Zonta Says NO to Violence Against Women” is a Zonta International campaign to raise awareness of and increase actions to end violence against women and girls around the world; and

Whereas; the “Zonta Says No” campaign encourages the service and advocacy actions of Zonta clubs to prevent and end violence against women and girls in their local communities; and

Whereas; the Zonta Club of Tallahassee was chartered in 1980 and has supported Zonta International programs and worked with many local agencies to achieve the objectives of Zonta International and improve women’s lives; and

Whereas; as of July 2015 more than 300 sexual offense evidence kits collected by the Tallahassee Police Department and Leon County Sheriff’s Office over a 14 year period were not submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement for forensic testing; and

Whereas; currently, Florida statute does not specify requirements regarding the testing of sexual offense evidence kits; and

Whereas; a proviso was adopted during the Florida Legislature’s 2015 Special Session directing the Florida Department of Law Enforcement to conduct a statewide assessment of untested sexual offense evidence kits, including both kits that have been submitted to a laboratory for analysis and those that have not been submitted; and

Whereas; to implement the proviso, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement conducted a survey of all of the State’s law enforcement agencies; and

Whereas; this survey required the agencies to identify the number of sexual offense evidence kits that have not been submitted for analysis, the number of sexual offense evidence kits that should be submitted for analysis, and the number of sexual offense evidence kits that are from victims who chose to not report their sexual assaults to law enforcement; and

Whereas; as of January 1, 2016, 279 local law enforcement agencies responded to the survey, which represents 89 percent of this state’s population and 91% of reported rapes, according to the FDLE’s Uniform Crime Report statistics; and

Whereas; the survey found 13,435 unsubmitted Sexual Offense Examination Kits within the inventories of these local law enforcement agencies; and

Whereas, according to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement approximately 9,484 of them should be submitted for testing; and

Whereas the Florida Department of Law Enforcement Assessment of Unsubmitted Sexual Offense Examination Kits encourages the timely submission of Kits and limiting the impact to state and county laboratories by developing legislation to require law enforcement agencies to implement internal agency policies and/or tracking systems for Kits; a formal policy requiring the submission of all Kits except those obtained from a non-reporting victim; and standardized guidelines and procedures for collecting and submitting Kits in connection with a sexual assault; and

Whereas; the Florida House of Representatives and the Florida Senate will consider during the 2016 Legislative Session proposed legislation to address the collection and processing of sexual offense evidence kits; and

Whereas; the prompt testing of sexual offense evidence kits is consistent with Zonta International objectives to 1) improve the legal status of women, 2) promote justice and universal respect for human rights and freedoms; and 3) to work to end violence against women; and

Whereas; the State of Florida should demonstrate its respect for the health and well-being of women by ensuring that the criminal justice system responds promptly; and

Whereas; women who are victims of sexual violence should expect evidence will be gathered and processed accurately and promptly to increase the likelihood that perpetrators will be apprehended; and

Whereas; there is an increased likelihood of identifying and convicting perpetrators of sexual assault through the prompt and proper processing of evidence.

BE IT RESOLVED, therefore, that:

Zonta Club of Tallahassee voices its strong support for legislation dealing with Sexual Offense Examination Kits that:

1. Provides for submission by local law enforcement agencies for testing no later than 30 days after collection;
2. Directs the development and adoption of appropriate statewide protocols for appropriate collection, submission and testing of DNA evidence at statewide and local levels. Protocols should include, but not be limited to, addressing the testing of "Jane Doe" sexual offense kits to assist in the identification and prosecution of rapists;
3. Does not limit the right of a victim to file an action for enforcement of the laws regarding collection of forensic evidence after a sexual offense or for damages or relief associated with violation of the law; and
4. Provides full funding for testing by any entity within the statewide criminal analysis laboratory system.

Adopted January, 19, 2016 by Zonta Club of Tallahassee

Lisa Maynard Pasquarelli, President