

Substitute for House Resolution No. 382.

A resolution to urge the Congress of the United States to approve President Obama's budget proposal to provide \$35 million to help communities process evidence from untested sexual assault kits.

Whereas, Sexual violence continues to plague our nation and destroy lives. Women and girls are the vast majority of victims, and nearly one in five women, or about 22 million, have been raped during their lifetimes. Men and boys are also at risk and one in 71 men, or about 1.6 million, have been raped during their lifetimes. Nearly one-half of all female rape survivors were raped before 18 years of age, and over one-quarter of male rape survivors were raped before 10 years of age; and

Whereas, Effective collection of forensic evidence is of paramount importance to successfully prosecuting sex offenders, as is performing sexual assault forensic exams in a sensitive, dignified, and victim-centered manner. Sexual assault forensic examinations are intrusive, lengthy, and complex medical examinations that take an average of three to four hours. A victim who agrees to a sexual assault forensic exam reasonably expects evidence collected from that exam, also referred to as a rape kit, to be analyzed; and

Whereas, The federal government has estimated that hundreds of thousands of rape kits sit untested in police and crime storage facilities across the country in what is known as the rape kit backlog. Crime labs have struggled over the past decade to meet the demand for DNA testing for all types of crimes. With demand continuing to outpace capacity--the Joyful Heart Foundation estimates that every two minutes someone is sexually assaulted in the U.S.--the backlog in testing evidence collected from sexual assault forensic exams will likely continue to grow; and

Whereas, Untested sexual assault kits mean lost opportunities to develop DNA profiles, search for matches, link cold cases, and bring justice and resolution to the victim. DNA can help identify unknown offenders and when the offender is known, it can result in "cold hits" connecting the known suspect to other crimes. Failure to test evidence collected from a sexual assault kit in a timely manner can be tragic, from expired statutes of limitation that preclude prosecution even if a suspect is later identified, to additional rape and murder victims of serial rapists; and

Whereas, Local jurisdictions that have attempted to alleviate the rape kit backlog have impressive results to show for their efforts. With federal funding, the Wayne County Prosecuting Attorney's Office along with the Detroit Police Department, has begun to address a backlog of more than 10,000 rape kits. Among those first 1,600 kits tested, there were 455 matches in the DNA database, including matches linking to crimes committed in 22 other states and the District of Columbia. The Prosecutor's Office identified 127 potential serial rapists and obtained 14 convictions of potential serial rapists who are tied to rapes reported in 12 other states and the District of Columbia; and

Whereas, Testing sexual assault kits provides essential evidence. But, equally essential is the investigation and prosecution of identified perpetrators, without which survivors are denied justice, rapists remain free to assault with impunity, and our communities continue to suffer emotionally and economically; and

Whereas, Reducing the rape kit backlog is a national concern requiring a national response. Federal funding is crucial to help communities in Michigan and other states to test and follow up on untested sexual assault kits; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives, That we urge the Congress of the United States to approve President Obama's budget proposal to provide \$35 million to help communities process evidence from untested sexual assault kits; and be it further

Resolved, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to the President of the United States Senate, the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, and the members of the Michigan congressional delegation.