



Pennsylvania Department of the

AUDITOR GENERAL

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News for Immediate Release

Jan. 26, 2017

PA Auditor General DePasquale, Williamsport Girl Begin Nationwide Change.org Petition Calling for All States to Fund Rape Kit Testing

Madison Wertz, 11, has already collected 750 signatures on a petition to end the backlog in PA

HARRISBURG – Meet Madison Wertz.

Madison is an 11-year-old sixth-grader at Lycoming Valley Intermediate School near Williamsport. And for the last 10 months, she has been a passionate advocate for ending Pennsylvania's backlog of untested rape kits.

"On her own, Madison created a petition to raise awareness and funding in Pennsylvania that would help pay to test rape kits," Auditor General Eugene DePasquale said. "And in just a few months, she's gathered more than 750 signatures."

Today, DePasquale is helping Madison launch a new initiative: A nationwide Change.org petition calling for all states to find funding to pay to test their rape kits and to upload all usable DNA into the federal database, known as CODIS, to help identify serial offenders. The petition will be sent to all 50 U.S. governors.

"I am so impressed by Madison's drive and commitment," DePasquale said. "Her perseverance shows that anyone, regardless of age, can make a difference on issues that really matter."

DePasquale released a [70-page special report](#) in September 2016 that showed Pennsylvania had at least 3,102 rape kits awaiting testing, including 1,852 that were backlogged (had been awaiting testing for 12 months or more).

"Unfortunately, that number likely represents an undercounting of the kits awaiting testing in the commonwealth, because only a fraction of local law enforcement agencies participated in the first annual count," DePasquale said. "Thankfully, we know from the three major public crime labs that handle rape kits that significant progress was made in 2016 toward testing these kits."

The Pennsylvania State Police Bureau of Forensic Services reported just this week that it completed testing on a total of 936 rape/sexual assault cases in 2016 — 93 percent of which were cases that occurred after September 2015.

Last month, Philadelphia Police Department's Office of Forensic Science reported it had outsourced more than 900 of its 1,574 kits for testing in 2016, and the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner said it had outsourced about 250 kits it received from submitting municipalities, which includes Pittsburgh.

But Pennsylvania's backlog is a small fraction of the problem nationwide. The Joyful Heart Foundation, the New York-based national organization founded by "Law and Order: SVU" star Mariska Hargitay, estimates hundreds of thousands of kits nationwide are awaiting testing — some of them for decades.

"Every kit could represent a victim still awaiting justice," DePasquale said. "It is unconscionable that these victims have voluntarily subjected themselves to an hours-long examination, had potential evidence collected from their bodies, and that evidence has been allowed to sit on shelves."

“Not testing these kits allows rapists and serial criminals to continue to walk free,” DePasquale continued.

“I look forward to working with Madison to help victims find healing and justice, and to help put criminals behind bars, where they can’t hurt anyone else.”

The petition, “Fund the Testing of Backlogged Rape Kits,” is available online at: www.change.org.

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