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TEXAS STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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GUILLEN: RIGHT DIRECTION FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT

Backlog in Rape Kits in Texas Has Shrunk Due to Legislative Action

AUSTIN - April is Sexual Assault Awareness month and Representative Ryan Guillen (D- Rural South Texas) is proud to announce that Texas has been successful in reducing the backlog of untested rape kits. HB 1729, of which Guillen was an author, took effect in 2017 and established a grant program to fund the testing of more rape kits.

"As Texans, we must ensure that justice is served to those who commit crimes," said Guillen. "This bill was a step in the right direction for victims of sexual assault, but more remains to be done and I will continue to fight for these victims and their families."

A rape kit—also known as a sexual assault kit—is a package of items used by medical personnel for gathering and preserving physical evidence following an allegation of sexual assault. The evidence collected from the victim can aid the criminal rape investigation and the prosecution of a suspected assailant. DNA evidence can have tremendous utility for sexual assault investigations and prosecution by identifying offenders, revealing serial offenders through DNA matches across cases, and exonerating those who have been wrongly accused. However, due to both the issue of rape kits not being submitted to crime labs for testing and the related issue of crime labs not having enough resources to test all of the submitted kits, there has developed a nationwide backlog in the processing of rape kits.

The State of Texas was the first state to enact comprehensive laws that covered all 6 pillars of rape kit reform, including laws requiring an audit, testing of backlogged kits, testing of newly collected kits, tracking of kits, victims' right to notice provisions, and funding for rape kit reform. In January of 2017 there were 18,946 untested kits in Texas and now only 2,138 untested kits remain.

HB 1729 provides an innovative solution for the long-term funding of this testing by creating a grant program funded by voluntary donations from Texans when they apply for or renew their driver's licenses. During the past legislative session, Rep. Guillen also helped secure the \$4,219,000 in initial funding to test the backlogged kits.

"We must constantly strive for a better, safer Texas, and this measure was a necessary step towards that goal," Guillen added.

Serving ten rural South Texas counties in the Texas House of Representatives, Ryan Guillen is known for his hard work, fierce independence, and relentless efforts for South Texas families. Recently, Capitol Inside called him a "House Bill Machine," and a "one-person assembly line for legislation." Since elected, few other legislators have passed more bills than Guillen. Sign up for updates at ryanguillen.com, facebook.com/representative.guillen, and twitter.com/ryanguillen

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