

**Prepared Statement by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on the Constitution
Hearing on “Taking Sexual Assault Seriously: The Rape Kit Backlog and Human Rights”
May 20, 2015**

Today, the Judiciary Committee will hear from several witnesses about untested DNA evidence from sexual assault forensic exams. We will consider whether backlogs of untested DNA evidence remain a problem, despite the enactment in 2004 of the Debbie Smith Act.

The Debbie Smith Act, which is named after our first witness, originally passed Congress, with my support, as part of the 2004 Justice for All Act. Congress last reauthorized this important federal statute in 2014. It sends funds to states to help reduce backlogs of untested DNA evidence from crime scenes and from convicted offenders.

Reducing such backlogs of untested DNA evidence is critically important to survivors of sexual violence, as Debbie Smith will today testify. We are pleased to have Debbie, who played such an important role in the enactment of the Debbie Smith Act, with us at today’s hearing.

In 1989, Debbie was raped by a masked intruder. She reported the crime and underwent a sexual assault forensic exam. Debbie waited approximately six years for the rapist to be identified. The case eventually was solved, thanks to DNA evidence. Since then, Debbie and her husband, Rob, a former police officer, have advocated for full funding of the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Reduction Program.

This program has helped crime labs around the nation promptly analyze DNA evidence, like that which was key to identifying Debbie Smith’s rapist. In this same period, however, the demand for DNA testing has increased as well, because jurisdictions around the country have increased their reliance on forensic evidence as a crime solving tool.

Because DNA evidence is now, and likely will continue to be, such an important tool in identifying perpetrators of rape and other crimes, it is crucial that the evidence be examined in a timely manner. Collecting and analyzing such evidence is important to catch offenders before they strike again. It is completely unacceptable for forensic evidence from crimes of sexual violence to sit untested for months or even longer while rapists remain at large and the statute of limitations is expiring.

Over the last decade, members of this Committee have played an important role in ensuring that the Debbie Smith Act is reauthorized and the DNA Backlog Reduction Program is funded. This year, I joined Senator Cornyn and 28 other colleagues in calling on Senate Appropriations leaders to again make this program a priority in the fiscal year 2016 appropriations process.

I want to thank Senator Cornyn for his involvement in organizing today’s subcommittee hearing and his leadership in chairing it. I welcome our other witnesses and look forward to hearing their testimony on this important issue.