

State Auditor Tim Keller Launches Statewide “Rape Kit” Backlog

Written by Gallupsun Staff
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Audit Aims to identify causes of statewide backlog

SANTA FE – New Mexico State Auditor Tim Keller announced May 5 that the Office of the State Auditor is conducting a statewide audit of the inventory of untested sexual assault evidence kits, commonly referred to as “rape kits.”

The OSA will survey all law enforcement agencies statewide regarding their practices for handling rape kits and has selected certain law enforcement agencies around the state for a special audit to perform a detailed review of policies and procedures related to the kits.

The special audit will outline best practices needed to clear the backlog and prevent it from happening again.

“Clearing the backlog of sexual assault evidence kits is absolutely critical for survivors and for our state’s public safety. Last year, over 5,000 untested kits were identified in New Mexico. Now we will look at the policies, procedures and practices that will tell us how the backlog came to be,” Keller said “We are working with law enforcement agencies and stakeholders to shine a light on what changes are needed to eliminate the backlog and keep it from happening again.” The law enforcement agencies that follow were selected for the in-depth special audit based on factors such as geographic location and size: Albuquerque Police Department, Bernalillo County Sheriff’s Office, Curry County Sheriff’s Office, Farmington Police Department, Gallup Police Department, Grant County Sheriff’s Office, Hobbs Police Department, and Las Cruces Police Department.

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OSA staff will also meet with community members and advocates in each of these locations. Designation for the Sexual Assault Evidence Kit Special Audit does not indicate that the OSA has identified or suspects any irregularity in the Agency’s handling of kits.

“We appreciate the efforts of Auditor Keller to take a close look at the procedures in handling our state’s untested Sexual Assault Evidence Kits,” said Connie Monahan, the Statewide Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Coordinator at NM Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. “Many survivors consent to having evidence collected because they trust that the kits will be examined. We owe it to them to uphold that promise and to not let this happen again.”

In 2015, the OSA worked with the Department of Public Safety and other agencies and advocates to identify a backlog of over 5,000 untested sexual assault evidence kits in the state. Law enforcement agencies have been working with the crime labs to process the backlog and the Legislature appropriated funds to assist with this effort.

However, in addition to testing the backlog, it is imperative to understand the policies and procedures that may have contributed to the creation of a backlog. Without this insight, the state runs the risk of spending substantial resources to clear the backlog now, only to find itself with a new backlog of kits in a few years. (continued on next page)

The audit work will take place this summer and the results, including the best practices, will be made available to policymakers and the public.