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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**CALCASA, Assemblymember Skinner, and the Alameda County District Attorney's Office
Rally to Celebrate New Law to Expedite and Ensure Rape Kit Testing**

OAKLAND—The effort to ensure that sexual assault evidence is tested and the DNA obtained entered into a national database scored a victory with Governor Brown's signing of Assembly Bill 1517, authored by Assemblymember Nancy Skinner (D-Berkeley).

"Leaving these kits on law enforcement property shelves gives serial rapists a free pass," Assemblymember Skinner said, "AB 1517 will help ensure that criminal evidence contained in rape kits is tested promptly and that more rapists are caught and convicted."

Assembly Bill 1517 amends the Sexual Assault DNA Victims' Bill of Rights. Under the bill's timelines, law enforcement agencies would submit rape kits to crime labs within 20 days, and crime labs would process the DNA evidence and submit it to CODIS, the national database of DNA profiles, within 120 days.

"Reporting a sexual assault crime is a courageous act," Assemblymember Skinner said, "AB 1517 lets rape survivors know that solving these crimes and prosecuting sexual assault criminals is a California priority."

One person who knows exactly how much courage it takes to report an assault is Heather Marlowe. "When I was raped, the San Francisco police department left the rape kit untested for two and a half years and kept me in the dark," said Marlowe. "Finding out that the evidence from my assault wasn't deemed important enough to test was like being victimized all over again." Thanks to AB 1517, law enforcement will now be required to notify victims if the evidence from their assault hasn't been analyzed and uploaded to CODIS within six months.

There is no comprehensive data on the exact number of unprocessed rape kits in California, but local studies provide insight into the scope of the problem. Starting in June 2011, District Attorney O'Malley partnered with every law enforcement agency in Alameda County to audit all law enforcement property rooms for untested rape kits. This research revealed more than 1,900 untested rape kits in Alameda County alone.

"After a sexual assault, a victim undergoes an invasive physical examination to gather forensic evidence. To leave this evidence untested is unconscionable. Yet this happens all too often. The passage of this law marks a victory for sexual assault survivors. Critical DNA

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evidence will no longer languish untested in storage rooms. DNA will be tested and uploaded into a national data base, enabling law enforcement to identify and prosecute the criminals,” states District Attorney O’Malley. “I commend Governor Brown for signing this groundbreaking piece of legislation and am confident that the efforts underway in California will lead to similar advances throughout the country.”

The testing of rape kits is a powerful tool for linking cold cases and bringing justice to sexual assault survivors. In 2003, New York City tested its backlog of 17,000 rape kits and ushered in a new policy to test all rape kits in police evidence. As a result, the arrest rate for rape in New York City jumped from 40 percent to 70 percent, well above California’s rate of 23 percent. DNA evidence from rape kits can also exonerate the innocent. Earlier this month, DNA analysis caused a North Carolina court to release two mentally disabled men after serving thirty years in prison for the rape and murder of an 11-year old girl.

AB 1517 is sponsored by Alameda County District Attorney Nancy. O’Malley, the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA) and Natasha’s Justice Project.

“We applaud Governor Brown for prioritizing survivors of sexual assault,” said Sandra Henriquez, Executive Director of CALCASA. “This is a great moment for California to lead the nation in the movement to end sexual violence, restore survivor confidence in the criminal justice system and prevent future backlogs.”

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CALCASA is the only statewide organization in California whose sole purpose is to promote public policy, advocacy, training and technical assistance on the issue of sexual assault. CALCASA convenes statewide and national training conferences and its primary membership is composed of the 84 rape crisis centers and rape prevention programs in CA. Its affiliate membership is comprised of local, statewide and national organizations, businesses, and individuals committed to the elimination of sexual violence. For more information, visit www.calcasa.org.

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