

After the rape, all I wanted to do was take a scalding hot shower to burn the traces of his fingerprints from my skin. I didn't. I needed a doctor - I needed somebody to tell me why I was bleeding through my underwear when I wasn't on my period. When I arrived at the hospital, I was stripped of all my clothes, my underwear put into a brown paper evidence bag. I would lie on my back on a medical bed, with my legs in stir-ups, watching myself like I was already dead and going through an autopsy. This couldn't be happening to me. I watched them comb through my pubic hair, looking for him. I watched as the swabs from inside my vagina turned from white to red, and my blood was left to dry, before being placed in an airtight vial that they promised would reach the lab. I was told I had a tear in the labia minora at 9:00 and 1:00. My nurse examiner asked if I had been penetrated by a foreign object, because of the 2,000 cases he had worked on, the severity of my injury was in his top 5. I was asked to recount my rape in full - how I was positioned, what he said to me. This was the first time I had put words to the horror and allowed them to escape my mouth. These words felt sacred. By the time I left the hospital, it was midnight. At the end of the night, I left with Plan B, and five different types of antibiotics. One of the antibiotics they had to administer through a shot in the rear. These antibiotics would tie my stomach in knots for days after, forcing me to eat just saltines and rice.

The first twenty four hours after the rape were focused simply on survival. When I was on my way to get my rape kit, my mind was an anxious cacophony of "what nows?" *This happened in my bed. I need a new bed. My room isn't safe - I need to leave. Permanently? No. Deep breathes. Wait this happened in my body too. He was inside me. I need to shed my skin. Oh God, why am I crying? I need to get to the hospital. I need to see a doctor.* My head was splitting open. It was a herculean effort just to feed myself in the hours after. Reporting to the police felt oppressive, like a burden I didn't ask for. But my nurse examiner's remarks convinced me that maybe I should. My rapist inflicted a serious and exceptional injury. I knew the horror stories of reporting a rape to the police, but I thought my injury could be the deciding factor that tipped the scales of justice in my favor. I thought the bloody teardrops running down my inner thigh would ultimately mean something.

But it ended up meaning nothing. My detective and prosecutor would never even see the swabs. My rape kit was never processed and tested. Getting it was pointless.

I have spent 686 days trying to find out my rape kit's final resting place. Is it in a warehouse? Has it already been destroyed?

Act 29 of 2019 Section 2(b) states that I have a right to be notified of the status of my rape kit and that I can elect my victim advocate to receive the notice on my behalf.

But this isn't happening. Pennsylvania needs a rape kit tracking system to give Act 29 of 2019 any meaning.

I have filed a right-to-know request with the county which was denied.

My county victim advocate has asked my prosecutor for notification of the whereabouts of my rape kit and has received no response.

I have filed a complaint under the Crime Victims Act for failure to notify me about the status of my rape kit.

Both the detective and prosecutor refused to cooperate with my state victim advocate.

When I was informed my case was “unfounded,” or baseless, the very same detective and prosecutor hadn’t ever looked at the evidence of the crime scene - my underwear, my injury, my blood. I was told my case was denied for prosecution on April Fools Day. I remember thinking this had to be a prank, this couldn’t be real. But it was real. My prayer for justice in the form of blood and skin cells never reached God because as far as I know, it never left the hospital. I had to accept the truth - I just was not raped in the right way for the justice system to care.

That night, I was enraged and all I wanted to do was keep fighting. I actually imagined one day writing a grant to create a rape kit tracking system or submitting my story to a senator. But when my adrenaline ran out, all that was left was crippling disappointment. After being a victim of the criminal legal system for months, I was completely worn down.

The failure to test my rape kit haunted me. It was a constant reminder of how little my rape mattered to law enforcement, how unsafe I and other were as my rapist moved about the world with impunity. Four months after my case was denied, I wrote the following entry in my journal:

“The institutional betrayal is devastating. It feels like nobody cares about what happened to me. They treated my rape like it was just one bad night, but it was so much more than that. He didn’t just take one night from me, he took all nights from me indefinitely. I fear meeting new people. I am completely switching careers. Everytime I get my period, I think back to when he made me bleed through my underwear. Sometimes I need to switch the side of the bed I sleep on because on one side I was raped. I haven’t worn the pants I wore that day since. They were my favorite pair of pants. I was paranoid for the first month after the assault whenever my roommate came in unannounced - I thought he had finally come to kill me after he found out I reported him. Little did I know he wouldn’t be contacted for months. I bought a home video camera, an SOS keychain, I looked into buying a taser, I moved out of my apartment for weeks - I was terrified of him. I never went back to the gym where we met - one of my favorite places. I have been living in a world where nothing I do can keep me safe. Nothing I do can keep others safe from him. If he is a serial rapist, they may have just discarded the only way of knowing. I count down the hours before I can go back to sleep and be numb again. I wish none of this were real.”

It still hurts to talk about today. Almost two years later, as I stand here today, my rapist is the next town over. I needed a safety plan to even be here today. But I am here because injustice will not win, he will not silence me. I’m here to honor that voice from April Fools Day, the voice that said what happened to me should never have happened and future victims deserve something better. I’m here not because I think my experience is unique - quite the opposite. I’m here because out of every 20 reported rapes, only 1 perpetrator is arrested and the remaining victims whose assailant went free likely have a story just as horrific as mine. I’m here not just because my rape kit - containing literal pieces of me - was buried as I still lived, but because a tracking system is the only way to locate the mass graves of so many others for whom the system has failed. We don’t often discuss this graveyard of rape cases and kits, but today’s discussion demands a reckoning with this epidemic - one that you, Senators, are equipped to address. You could ensure that no more victims search for their rape kit in unmarked graves, like I did.

