WEST VIRGINIA CODE: §15-9B-4

§15-9B-4. Submission, testing, and retention of sexual assault forensic examination kits.

(a) The Sexual Assault Forensic Examination Commission created by §15-9B-1 of this code shall establish a subgroup of persons with subject matter expertise to establish best-practice protocols for the submission, testing, retention, and disposition of sexual assault forensic examination kits collected by health care providers. The commission shall propose rules for legislative approval, in accordance with §29A-3-1 *et seq*. of this code, detailing best-practice protocols. Upon approval of the legislative rules, local sexual assault forensic examination boards shall follow the rules.

(b) Rules promulgated pursuant to subsection (a) of this section shall include:

(1) Time frames for submission of sexual assault forensic examination kits in the possession of law enforcement;

(2) Protocols for storage of DNA samples and sexual assault forensic examination kits; and

(3) Requiring a hospital to have trained health care provider available or transfer agreement as provided in a county plan, to complete a sexual assault forensic examination. "Available" includes, but not limited, having access to a trained sexual assault forensic examination expert via telehealth.

(c) The commission may promulgate emergency rules pursuant to the provisions of §29A-3-15 of this code in order to implement this section: *Provided*, That no emergency rule may permit the destruction of any DNA evidence.

(d) Upon collection, a sexual assault forensic examination kit shall be submitted for testing by the health care provider to the West Virginia State Police Forensic Laboratory within 30 days of collection or as soon thereafter as practicable. All packaging kits for transmittal and transmittal protocols shall be designed to meet applicable standards for maintaining the efficacy of the sample and chain of custody.

(e) No sexual assault forensic examination kit need be tested where the alleged victim has not consented to the testing, requests that the kit not be tested, where he or she recants as to the allegation of a sexual offense, or the allegation that a sexual offense occurred is determined to be unfounded. If the alleged victim does not consent to law enforcement involvement, the kit shall be designated a nonreported kit and transmitted to the Marshall University Forensic Science Center.

(f) The commission shall, in cooperation with the West Virginia State Police, develop protocols for storage of previously tested materials to be made available for secondary

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testing upon a court order to do so.

(g) Biological evidence obtained through tests of a sexual assault forensic examination kit shall not be destroyed:

(1) During the time period of incarceration of a person whose DNA was identified by the use of the biological evidence, or while the person remains under continued supervision, whichever is later in time; or

(2) For as long as the offense from which the biological evidence is obtained remains unresolved.

(h) Notwithstanding any provision of this code, or any rule or policy promulgated thereunder, upon completion of the processing and testing set forth in subsection (d) of this section, the sexual assault forensic examination kit shall be transmitted to the appropriate investigating local or state law-enforcement agency which shall retain all identified biological material that is secured in connection with any sexual offense or attempted sexual offense for the periods set forth in subsection (g) of this section.

(i) After processing and testing of a sexual assault forensic examination kit, the West Virginia State Police Laboratory shall transmit the sexual assault forensic examination kit to the appropriate investigating state or local law-enforcement agency through any reasonable means sufficient to establish the proper chain of custody, including, but not limited to, use of the United States Postal Service or hand delivery by appropriate personnel or a law-enforcement officer. The appropriate investigating state or local law-enforcement agency shall preserve the sexual assault forensic examination kit for the period of time prescribed in subsection (g) of this section in a condition where any biological evidence is suitable for DNA testing. The lack of timely submission, or the inadvertent loss or destruction of a sexual assault forensic examination kit, standing alone, shall not constitute a bar to the prosecution of a sexual offense.

(j) Sexual assault forensic examination kits retained pursuant to this section shall be made available for DNA testing pursuant to §15-2B-7 of this code or pursuant to an appropriate order of a circuit court of competent jurisdiction for secondary testing.

(k) The appropriate investigating state or local law-enforcement agency responsible for retaining the sexual assault forensic examination kit shall obtain approval from the circuit court of competent jurisdiction for the county in which the crime occurred before disposal of any biological evidence. Before the disposal of any sexual assault forensic examination kit, reasonable efforts shall be made to provide written notice to the victim by the prosecuting attorney of the county in which the crime occurred.

(l) Nothing in this section shall be construed as limiting a state or local law-enforcement agency’s discretion concerning the conditions under which biological evidence is retained, preserved, or transferred among different entities if the evidence is retained in a condition

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that is suitable for DNA testing.

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