

Dear Chairman Roy, Vice Chairwomen Rhodes and esteemed members of the House Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee,

My name is Britney Lane, and I am writing as a former Miss New Hampshire USA, and a sexual assault survivor fighting for the human rights of thousands of New Hampshire assault survivors. Most lawmakers and citizens are surprised when they find out basic rights for survivors are not always provided in a comprehensive way. But when you go through the experience of an assault, you understand how broken the system is. Although my assault did not occur in New Hampshire, I believe it is important that you know my story of what brought me here today.

I was sexually assaulted on November 2nd, 2019 by a coworker during a night out with friends. I repeated my story over and over that day starting with local police and ending with staff from two different hospitals. Following giving my statement to police, I went to my local hospital to have a rape kit done. I was immediately brought into a triage room and then transferred to a private room in the ER. I was seen by a doctor who then called for a nurse who was trained to complete rape kits. While I was waiting, nurses came in and took labs to test for drugs and STDs. I waited for three hours to find that they did not have a nurse to complete the kit. The hospital sent me across the street to another hospital. Their staff took me in immediately and completed my rape kit. All of the labs that the nurses took at the second hospital went into my rape kit. This kit would not be tested unless I pressed charges against my assailant. I was advised against pressing charges at the time by the officer that took my statement because he reported there was likely not enough evidence. Due to this, my rape kit still sits on a shelf untouched. Weeks after my rape kit was collected, I called the first hospital to find my lab results that they had run. I learned that they never ran the labs that were ordered, and my samples were now where to be found. To this day, I do not know what those lab results say.

During my high school and college years, I was provided education about consent and prevention when it came to sexual violence. No classroom taught me what to do following an assault. We didn't really talk about it in my family because if I followed all the prevention rules, something like this would never happen right? Despite the many prevention tactics I was taught, I still became a victim. Fortunately, my parents knew to bring me to the police and then the hospital. I knew to not shower or change my clothes thanks to Olivia Benson and Law and Order: SVU. A television show taught me more about this process than any institution.

Additionally, I worked as a child and family therapist and case manager in Manchester. Every single child and adolescent I worked with has experienced some form of trauma. The families I served are not always aware of their rights because they have never been taught about them. They don't know that they can ask for a rape kit after an assault. These families need to be able to access a comprehensive guide to their basic rights.

This is why this bill is so important. We need to be informed of our rights from the very beginning and be given access to these rights. I can't change what happened to me, but I can work to change the system to ensure no one is failed again. No person should ever feel in the dark about what happened to them. Changing the system from within is my justice. I am writing as Britney Lane but also as Miss New Hampshire USA 2023. I competed for this title to bring visibility to an important subject that is often overlooked because it's uncomfortable to talk about. But the way we make change is by having conversations like we are doing today. I am using this platform to share my experience and show other survivors that you are not alone and using your voice can make a difference. It means so much to me that important decision makers like yourself are listening. Thank you all for giving survivors a voice.