

RAINN Urges Congress to Support the Use of DNA in Solving Rape Cases

April 10, 2008 (Washington, DC) – RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), the nation’s largest anti-sexual assault organization, issued the following statement today regarding the hearing on the Debbie Smith Reauthorization Act of 2008 before the U.S. House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs:

“The Debbie Smith Act is the most important anti-rape legislation that Congress has ever passed, and it will soon expire if Congress does not act. It’s important that Congress reauthorize this program to eliminate the backlog of DNA evidence from rape cases across the country. If we let this act expire, we’re going to have a much harder time identifying rapists and bringing them to justice,” said Scott Berkowitz, president and founder of RAINN.

Congress made the processing of DNA from crime scenes a national priority by passing the Debbie Smith Act in 2004. RAINN urges Congress to reauthorize of the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Program to help us fully realize the program’s potential to solve rape cases, as proposed by the bill authored by Representative Carolyn Maloney, and U.S. House Judiciary Chairman John Conyers and Ranking Member Lamar Smith. We further urge the extension of other programs in Title III of the Justice for All Act of 2004, to ensure funding for sexual assault nurse/forensic examiner programs and the training of criminal justice personnel on forensic evidence collection and use.

“DNA and forensic backlogs have plagued our nation’s law enforcement,” said Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL). “The Debbie Smith Act has been instrumental in allowing those investigating crimes to identify and prosecute rapists in an efficient manner. It is critical that we continue our efforts to make our neighborhoods safe by taking these criminals off the streets.”

In passing the Debbie Smith Act of 2004, Congress correctly recognized that sex offenders

generally strike more than once. For this reason, reducing the backlog of DNA evidence from rape cases not only helps police identify rapists in existing unsolved cases, but also prevents future assaults and spares potential new victims by bringing perpetrators to justice early in their criminal careers. Undeniably, prosecuting rapists early on is the single most effective rape prevention tool that we have available.

At the time of the 2004 act's passage, the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that there was a backlog of hundreds of thousands of unanalyzed DNA samples in state or local crime labs and at evidence warehouses across the United States. Thanks to the implementation of this legislation, of which RAINN was a key supporter, federal funding allowed the nation's crime labs to do more DNA analysis, thereby helping us reduce that DNA backlog. But there is still much work to be done.

"There are still thousands of rape cases that remain unsolved, even though we have all the DNA evidence we need to find and convict the rapists. As a result, these rapists remain at large, finding new victims every single day," said Berkowitz. "We have already collected this evidence. Now we need to use it."

We commend Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) and members of the subcommittee for holding today's hearing and fighting to expanded use of crime technology to solve rape cases. We also applaud Representatives Maloney, Conyers, and Smith for authoring the Debbie Smith Reauthorization Act of 2008 (H.R. 5057), and we thank the other 38 members of Congress who have cosponsored this bill.

About RAINN

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization and was named one of "America's 100 Best Charities" by Worth magazine. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotlines (800.656.HOPE and rainn.org) in partnership with over 1,100 local rape crisis centers across the country. The hotlines have helped more than 1.2 million people since 1994. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual assault, help victims and ensure that rapists are brought to justice. For more information about RAINN, please visit rainn.org.