

Congressional Hearing
April 10, 2008

Let me begin by thanking each of you for allowing me to be here this morning and for the commitment Congress has shown to victims by funding The Debbie Smith Act. I am deeply grateful to the House for you have consistently voted to fully fund this important piece of legislation. Your message was finally heard as last year for the first time Congress essentially fully funded The Debbie Smith Act. It is truly a privilege to be given an opportunity to be a small part of the legislative process ... it is also one of the most terrifying things I have ever done.

My personal experience as a rape victim provides me with the understanding of the devastation of this crime. With understanding comes knowledge and with knowledge comes responsibility. This vivid understanding has changed my life forever.

I truly believed that March 3, 1989 would be the last day that I would feel the loving touch of my husband's embrace or hear the precious voices of my children say, "Mommy, I love you." It was on that Friday afternoon

that a stranger entered my home threatening to kill me if I screamed. He then abducted, blindfolded and led me to the woods behind my home where he robbed and repeatedly raped me.

After being raped I struggled with trying to live with the memories of that day. For 6½ years the smell of his breath, the touch of his cool, damp coat sleeve around my neck, the sight of his black rubber boots and the sound of his voice in my ears reminding me, “Remember I know where you live and I will come back to kill you if you tell anyone” were all stored in my mind unwilling to be discarded. I needed peace, security and to feel normal again. I had no hope that I would ever attain this vital relief. I had found the fate worse than death and it was living with the painful memory, living with the fear that he would fulfill his promise to return to kill me or even worse that he would he take out his revenge on my children or my husband. I merely existed for those 6½ years as fear held my heart and soul within its grip, choking out any joy of life. I became suicidal, seeking peace and rest from the pictures that played without warning in my mind. Finally a DNA cold

hit offered peace to my fearful heart, gave validation to my accusations, administered justice, and prevented this man from claiming another victim. With his conviction the jury sentenced him to two life sentences plus 25 years with no parole.

How do I convey something so deeply rooted in my heart that the only way I have found to express it is through action? Perhaps if you can picture in your mind the reality of what I have seen in labs and police evidence lockers all across our great country you will have a sense of the urgency I feel. Row after row of shelves from floor to ceiling holding boxes of every size with numbers written in black ink containing vital evidence, dusty and untouched. These are not just boxes but represent real people ... people trying to live past the memory of the day that evidence had been taken from their body. These victims have family and friends who may be watching the self destruction that often accompanies sexual assault. These are people who are waiting as I had waited but for how many was it already too late?

When a rape victim submits to the very intrusive evidence collection process she at least knows that she has done her part ... she has done all that has been asked of her ... to keep this man from hurting anyone else. Unfortunately, there is a very good chance that this vital evidence will sit on a shelf with another estimated 350,000 rape kits each holding within it vital evidence that is crucial to the safety of women everywhere. Each day that passes without the identity of these rapists being known, allows them to continue to claim victims ... and they will. We simply cannot allow these women to feel violated again by our negligence to do all we can to provide them justice and safety.

It is for these victims that my husband and I have sacrificed our income, retirement and time. It is for them that we continue to return to your offices pleading for proper appropriation of funds and now for re-authorization of this bill. I am not a paid lobbyist. Living on a retired policeman's pay is not easy, in fact if it were not for our foundations fundraising efforts and the support from local and national businesses we could not afford to be here today as neither of us takes any type of

salary or honorarium for our labor. We travel all over our country training nurses, prosecutors, law enforcement and advocates on how to deal with victims and the value of this DNA. This is not a job for me ... this is my life ... my very heart. But I will do whatever it takes to give these victims a chance at justice.

We have made tremendous strides since the passing of the Debbie Smith Act but our success has also been our own worst enemy. As state legislators understand the power of DNA they have broadened the types of offenses they have included in the data base and more states are beginning to include all arrestees.

Detectives recognize its enormous ability in solving no-suspect cases and police officers are more aware of DNA's capabilities. Victims are grasping the connection between DNA and justice giving them the courage to submit to the humiliating rape kit. All of these wonderful achievements have caused a swell in the backlogs across our country. I was fortunate to have live in a state where the forensic scientists realized the potential of this valuable tool and found resources to

initiate a program. Unfortunately these resources were not as readily available in most states.

The swell having subsided, with another five years of federal funding crime labs can begin to eliminate their backlogs and the current unacceptable turn around time will be shortened. As the success of this powerful tool continues the public becomes more confident in the system and state and local budget writers will have the data needed to begin paying for their own DNA programs without federal assistance.

We must continue to keep DNA a priority, not to do so would mean losing valuable momentum. This science is distinctive in that it is tied to a national database, requiring involvement from Congress and state legislature to function. I would ask that you use the power afforded you to guide our wonderful country to using DNA to its fullest potential.

DNA is structurally a chain, yet this amazing piece of science, breaks the chains of emotional imprisonment, and becomes a chain of confinement for those who

would violate innocent citizens. DNA gives life, it administers justice, offers peace and validation, frees the innocent and I believe that it is one of the greatest crime prevention tools we have available today. All victims of crime deserve the experience of this gift of renewed life and I know that DNA can offer that gift. To withhold that gift would be the act of denying our citizens the promised right of liberty and justice granted by our constitution. So I am honored and proud to be here with all of you representing that hope of promised justice.