



Ventura County
SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Jim Fryhoff - Sheriff | John Reilly - Undersheriff



Ventura County
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Erik Nasarenko - District Attorney

MEDIA RELEASE

October 30, 2023

Ventura County Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Receives Second Grant

Sheriff James Fryhoff and District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today the award of a second \$2.5 million grant from the United States Department of Justice in support of the Ventura County Sexual Assault Kit Initiative. The Sheriff's Forensic Services Bureau, with assistance from the District Attorney's Office, applied for this supplemental grant to further efforts that began following receipt of a prior award of \$2.5 million in late 2021.

The Ventura County Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (VCSAKI) is a multi-agency countywide effort to test every sexual assault kit for the presence of DNA and investigate unsolved sexual assault cases. Approximately 3,000 kits have been located and will be tested as part of this initiative. Many of these kits pre-dated the advent of DNA technologies. While most of the kits have been tested utilizing the technology available at the time, the grant will allow us the opportunity to re-test the evidence through the lens of modern DNA analysis.

"This new award provides additional momentum for VCSAKI," said Sheriff Fryhoff. "We thank the Department of Justice for helping provide us with the resources we need to bring justice to as many victims as we can."

Half of the newly awarded funding will be utilized to fund sexual assault kit testing by a private lab for the presence of offender DNA. Funds will also be used to add an additional forensic scientist and a district attorney investigator to the effort. These personnel will join the scientists, investigator, victim advocate, and deputy district attorney already working to accomplish the goals of VCSAKI.

To date, the VCSAKI team has accomplished the following:

- The completion of a countywide sexual assault kit inventory by all Ventura County law enforcement agencies, the Forensic Services Bureau, and the Medical Examiner.
- An initial review of nearly 1,500 cases identifying those needing additional investigation.
- Identification and securing of a private DNA lab to speed up the testing of sexual assault kits.
- An initial send out of 100 sexual assault kits to a private lab for DNA testing.
- Adoption of a countywide protocol requiring timely DNA testing of sexual assault kits in the future.
- Formation of a cold case sexual assault unit within the District Attorney's Office to actively investigate unsolved sexual assault cases.

“We have a great partnership and a strong team that is committed to achieving justice for our sexual assault survivors,” said District Attorney Nasarenko. “We’re looking forward to the prosecutions that will result from this initiative. With new funds for testing and investigations we will utilize DNA to its greatest possible extent to hold sexual offenders accountable.”

More information on VCSAKI can be found at www.VCSAKI.com. Victims of past sexual assaults can also utilize this website to access support services including free counseling in some instances, or to get assistance in determining the status of their sexual assault kit.

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