



Sexual Assault Forensic Medical  
Evidence Review Board

# PRELIMINARY REPORT

Pursuant to SB 25-304

# 2025

# 1. Dedication to Victim-Survivors

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This report is dedicated to the victim-survivors whose courage, resilience, and persistence have shaped the path toward reform in Colorado. Many of the individuals most deeply impacted by sexual assault and the response system have shared their experiences, advocated for change, and fought for the legislation that created this Board. Their voices and leadership have been essential in bringing attention to gaps in the system and in driving meaningful progress.

We acknowledge the profound trauma that victim-survivors endure and recognize that each person's journey is unique. A sexual assault response system must do more than collect evidence or process cases - it must uphold dignity, foster healing, and support pathways to justice that honor the needs and choices of those harmed. Victim-survivors from marginalized and underserved communities often face compounding barriers, including limited access to culturally responsive support, fewer local resources, and systemic inequities that shape their journey toward help and healing. Their perspectives and needs must remain central to reform.

The Board reaffirms its commitment to victim-survivor-centered, trauma-informed reforms across Colorado's sexual assault response system. We are guided by the belief that every victim-survivor deserves timely care, transparent information, and a system that responds with compassion and accountability.

## 2. Appreciation for Contributors

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The Board extends its sincere appreciation to the many individuals and organizations who shared their expertise and perspectives throughout the development of this preliminary report. Conversations with subject-matter experts across forensic science, medical institutions, advocacy organizations, law enforcement, prosecution, and state agencies helped deepen the Board's understanding of Colorado's sexual assault response system. We also thank the victim-survivors, advocates, and community members who offered insights – whether publicly or privately – that informed this work.

The Board would like to acknowledge the following organizations for their collaboration and engagement, noting that this list is not exhaustive:

Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance (COVA), Rose Andom Center, Colorado Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), the Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) Project, Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police, County Sheriffs of Colorado (CSOC), Colorado Department of Public Safety, Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Forensic Services, Denver Police Department Crime Lab, Adams County Sheriff's Office Forensic Biology Unit, Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory, and the Colorado Springs Metro Laboratory.

### 3. Executive Summary

In 2025, the Colorado General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 25-304, creating the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board (“the Board”) and charging it with the evaluation of the state’s sexual assault response system, including the handling of sexual assault forensic medical evidence. This preliminary report - submitted within the first four months of the Board’s operation - reflects initial findings, early areas of focus, and administrative recommendations to strengthen the Board’s future work. Due to the limited timeframe, the Board has not issued substantive policy recommendations; instead, it identifies priority areas for deeper review in 2026 and beyond.

Sexual assault response in Colorado involves a complex network of professionals and agencies, from medical providers and Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) programs to advocacy organizations, law enforcement, forensic laboratories, and prosecutors. While Colorado has taken meaningful steps to improve this system, significant gaps remain. Victim-survivors continue to experience barriers and challenges in access to care, equitable services, communication with responding professionals, timeliness of forensic evidence analysis, and overall system navigation.

To guide its initial review of the sexual assault response system, the Board utilized a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) framework to examine three systemwide focus areas: (1) Victim-Survivor Support & Experience, (2) Training for Professionals, and (3) Evidence Collection, Testing, and Analysis. This analysis highlighted important statewide strengths as well as systemic challenges across this system. The “Opportunities” identified in this report are not official recommendations but rather highlight areas the Board intends to examine in the future.

Recognizing that its statutory mandate is broad and long-term, the Board also identified several administrative needs necessary for fulfilling its charge. These include adding designated municipal crime laboratory representation to the Board, expanding victim-survivor representation on the Board to include rural and urban perspectives, updating the Board’s name to reflect its full statutory scope, and extending funding beyond 2026 to allow for meaningful, systemwide analysis.

In 2026, the Board will deepen its review of the sexual assault response system through expanded stakeholder engagement and closer examination of training practices, laboratory capacity, resource gaps, and statewide coordination. Annual reports beginning November 1, 2026, will provide formal recommendations informed by this continued work. Through its preliminary findings, the Board reaffirms its commitment to a trauma-informed, victim-survivor-centered approach to reform and to strengthening Colorado’s sexual assault response system with transparency, accountability, and equity.

## 3A. Terminology in This Report

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Throughout this report, the term “victim-survivor” is used to describe individuals who have experienced sexual assault. This terminology reflects both the legal reality and the lived experience of those impacted by these crimes. In the criminal justice system, “victim” is the term used to indicate that a crime has occurred and to ensure access to statutory rights and protections; the term does not imply weakness, blame, or diminished agency. At the same time, many individuals and advocacy organizations prefer the term “survivor,” which emphasizes resilience, empowerment, and healing. Because each person’s experience and relationship to these terms is unique, the combined term victim-survivor has become an academic and professional standard. Using both terms together acknowledges the full continuum of experience and honors individuals as both victims of a crime and survivors of its impact, while remaining inclusive of the language each person may choose for themselves.

## 4. INTRODUCTION

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The majority of sexual assaults in the United States are not reported to law enforcement,<sup>1</sup> a reality shaped by psychological, sociocultural, and systemic factors [1,2]. Victim-survivors continue to face barriers rooted in both stigma and fragmented systems of response that impact their confidence in the justice process. One of the most prominent and visible challenges nationwide is the management and testing of sexual assault forensic evidence. This is not just biological evidence, but personal narratives of trauma, courage, and the pursuit of justice. When a victim-survivor chooses to get a medical forensic exam, medical professionals collect a Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence (SAFE) kit, or a sealed collection of biological samples, swabs, clothing, and documentation gathered to preserve potential DNA and other trace evidence. Across the country and in Colorado, SAFE kits remain stuck in backlogs, or the accumulation of kits that have not been submitted for testing, have been submitted but not yet processed, or are waiting in a queue at forensic laboratories. This can lead to delays that have significant implications for victim-survivors’ healing, public safety, and trust in the criminal-legal system.

Over the past decade, Colorado has joined a national movement to confront the complex and evolving challenges within sexual assault response systems - ranging from victim-survivor access to care and resources, professional training, interagency coordination, and the handling and tracking of sexual assault forensic evidence [3]. Policymakers, victim-survivors, advocacy organizations, law enforcement agencies, forensic and medical professionals and other stakeholders have sought to reduce backlogs of SAFE kits and improve the overall victim-survivor experience within Colorado’s sexual assault response system through a statewide kit tracking system, public-facing dashboards, and legislative reforms. Still, challenges remain across jurisdictions that negatively impact victim-survivor experience. Factors like resource availability, laboratory capacity, professional training opportunities, and interagency communication continue to impact case progression and victim-survivor confidence in the process. To address these challenges, the Colorado legislature passed Senate Bill 25-304, which established the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board (“the Board”) within the Department of Law.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Department of Justice’s 2020 Criminal Victimization report, only about 31% of rape and sexual assault cases are reported to law enforcement [1].

## 4A. About the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board

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The Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board is a multidisciplinary body charged with monitoring, analyzing, and suggesting improvements for the response to sexual assault in the state, including the handling and backlog of sexual assault forensic evidence. The Board is composed of representatives from law enforcement, health care, state agencies, victim-survivor advocacy and support organizations, prosecution, and the victim-survivor community. This broad composition ensures that the Board's deliberations are informed by technical expertise, victim-survivor perspectives, and operational realities across the state. The Attorney General and the Governor were required to appoint individuals to the Board, in accordance with the statute:

- The executive director of the Colorado district attorneys' council or their designee
- A representative of a statewide nonprofit organization that offers training and expert advice to sexual assault programs
- A representative of a statewide nonprofit organization that provides legal assistance to victims<sup>2</sup> of sexual assault
- A representative of a statewide organization that provides training and technical assistance for medical forensic exams
- A representative of a statewide association of chiefs of police
- A representative of a statewide association of sheriffs
- Three representatives from organizations that provide services or advocate for communities that experience disproportionate rates of sexual assault
- Up to three members, at the discretion of the attorney general, whose contributions the attorney general determines would be valuable to the work of the review board
- A representative of the Division of Criminal Justice in the Department of Public Safety who has oversight of the statewide sexual assault evidence collection kit tracking system created in section 24-33.5-113.5
- A representative of the Division of Criminal Justice in the Department of Public Safety who has oversight of federal and state victim service funding and victim rights compliance
- The Attorney General or designee

The appointments were made by the statutory deadline of August 1, 2025. The individuals appointed to the Board can be found in Appendix A.

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<sup>2</sup> The term "victim" is used in this section to reflect language used in the statute. "Victim-survivor" is used throughout the rest of the report.

Under SB25-304, the Board is directed to:

1. Review and monitor the effectiveness of the current protocols, standards, and training practices for the medical, law enforcement, and criminal-legal system response to sexual assault;
2. Develop recommendations to improve specific protocols, standards, and training practices for the medical, law enforcement, and criminal-legal system response to sexual assault;
3. Ensure victim-centered implementation of provisions regarding medical forensic exams for victims of sexual assault in the federal “Violence Against Women Act of 1994”;
4. Provide ongoing review of data and information regarding the needs, priorities, and services for responding to sexual assault throughout the state;
5. Monitor the effectiveness of laws concerning sexual assault and make recommendations to the general assembly to improve their effectiveness;
6. Make recommendations to the general assembly concerning the response to sexual assault, including medical forensic evidence, law enforcement reporting, and victim experience; and
7. On or before December 15, 2025, submit a preliminary report to the General Assembly. Annual reports on or before November 1, 2026, thereafter.

This report serves as the preliminary report required by statute.

## **5. BOARD ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

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From its formation in August 2025 to December 2025, the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board convened at least monthly to build a robust foundation for Board work and identify initial focus areas. All meetings were conducted virtually and were open to the public in compliance with Colorado’s Open Meetings Law (C.R.S. § 24-6-401 et seq.). Meetings included dedicated time for stakeholder participation, reflecting the Board’s commitment to inclusion, collaboration, and victim-survivor-centered processes.

During its initial four months, the Board prioritized creating a sustainable and clear structure for its operation in order to support both its immediate statutory reporting obligations and its long-term mission of system reform under SB 25-304. The Board's initial accomplishments include:

1. Establishing internal governance and procedures, including Board Operating Procedures and Standards for Recommendations;
2. Defining multidisciplinary working group structures for deeper review and analysis (Evidence, Policy, and Training – see section 5A for more information);
3. Employing a SWOT framework (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) to support initial review of the system's response to sexual assault. Initial focus areas include Victim-Survivor Support and Experience, Training for Professionals, and Evidence Collection, Testing, and Analysis.<sup>3</sup>
4. Engaging stakeholders and subject matter experts from across Colorado's sexual assault response system to ensure the Board's work is informed by diverse perspectives and lived experience.

## 5A. Board Methodology

### Overview of Three Working Groups

At its inaugural meeting, the Board voted to organize its work through three working groups - Evidence, Policy, and Training - to allow deeper exploration of specific system components and promote cross-disciplinary collaboration. Each group consists of self-appointed Board members and may include non-voting advisors who are recognized subject matter experts. Chairs and Vice Chairs were elected by working group members to ensure consistent leadership. The working group topics and scope are subject to change in the future with Board approval.

**The Evidence Working Group:** In alignment with directives outlined in SB 25-304, this group is tasked with reviewing and monitoring the effectiveness of current protocols and standards related to sexual assault forensic medical evidence collection, testing, and management across Colorado. Its purpose is to identify systemic barriers to timely, trauma-informed evidence collection and handling, and to recommend strategies that strengthen accountability, reduce backlogs, and improve victim-survivor experience. This group's activities have included initial review of state and nationwide evidence collection protocols, examination of the state's data tracking systems, consultation with forensic laboratories to assess resources gaps and needs, and discussion of victim-survivor access to care and resources across the state.

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<sup>3</sup> Although there was not a dedicated SWOT analysis for policy considerations, the Policy Working Group contributions are woven throughout the other 3 SWOT analysis focus areas.

**The Policy Working Group:** In alignment with directives outlined in SB 25-304, this group's charge includes monitoring the effectiveness of laws and policies that shape Colorado's sexual assault response system and making recommendations to improve their effectiveness across state and local jurisdictions. The Policy Working Group has established three categories of policies to review: statutory policies, non-statutory policies, and training policies. Activities so far have included the review of sexual assault criminal statutes in Colorado, exploration of inter-agency memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and consideration of training policies and incentives for law enforcement and other professionals in the sexual assault response system.

**The Training Working Group:** In alignment with directives outlined in SB 25-304, this group's purpose is to review and recommend improvements to training practices across the medical, law enforcement, advocacy, and legal systems. The Training Working Group is dedicated to strengthening the knowledge base, skills, and trauma-informed practices of the professionals who interact with victim-survivors. Guided by the experiences and needs of victim-survivors, and in collaboration with experts in the field, the group has begun examining gaps in training access and consistency across Colorado. This has included review of the content and delivery of sexual assault-related training for law enforcement, medical providers, prosecutors, and victim advocates.

Each working group Chair provides a verbal report at full Board meetings summarizing progress, recommendations, and any requests for action. Working group meetings were all compliant with Colorado's Open Meetings Law requirements to ensure accountability and public visibility.

### Community and Expert Engagement

To ensure comprehensive input, the Board has had robust engagement with community stakeholders and subject-matter experts from more than 15 agencies and organizations across the state. Representatives from municipal crime laboratories, Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CCASA), Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST), and the Ending Violence Against Women (EVAW) Project have participated in Board meetings as advisors. Actively engaged members of the public have also been invited to address the Board, as the general public's ability to provide opinion and feedback is an important part of the success of the Board's objectives. At the direction of the Board, the Board Project Manager has also engaged with many agencies to support and inform this work, including representatives from Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance (COVA), Rose Androm Center, Colorado Association of Chiefs of Police, County Sheriffs of Colorado (CSOC), Colorado Department of Public Safety, Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Forensic Services, Denver Police Department Crime Lab, Adams County Sheriff's Office Forensic Biology Unit, Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory, and the Colorado Springs Metro Laboratory.

The Board looks forward to continuing these relationships, as well as engaging additional stakeholders across the state in the future. To ensure that victim-survivor perspectives meaningfully guide this work, the Board will consider the implementation of dedicated listening sessions designed to center a broad range of lived experiences.

## 6. OVERVIEW OF THE COLORADO SEXUAL ASSAULT RESPONSE SYSTEM

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### 6A. Sexual assault response process in Colorado

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Understanding Colorado's sexual assault response system requires a deeper look at how victim-survivors move through multiple points of contact—from first disclosure to the conclusion of evidence testing and case resolution. Each step involves specialized professionals and carries implications for both justice outcomes and victim-survivor well-being.

The majority of victim-survivors of sexual assault never report the assault to law enforcement, and many do not disclose to anyone for weeks, months, or even years. When victim-survivors do disclose, they do so through a variety of pathways. Some choose to contact law enforcement directly, while others first reach out to advocacy hotlines, community-based advocates, health professionals, or trusted friends and family members for support. In the event that a victim-survivor does seek medical care following an assault, they are typically informed of their option to receive a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam.

#### Evidence Collection (Sexual Assault Forensic Exam)

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Specially trained medical professionals - often Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANEs) or Medical Forensic Examiners (MFEs) - conduct the Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE) and collect the SAFE kit at various hospitals, clinics, and health departments throughout the state. The exam has dual purposes: to provide medical evaluation and treatment to victim-survivors, and to document and collect potential evidence for use in a criminal investigation, including physical evidence, injuries, and biological samples for potential DNA testing. Some rural communities also benefit from TeleSANEs - a telehealth-based model that allows SANEs to guide and support medical professionals in conducting exams when an in-person SANE is not available.

Victim-survivor advocates are typically available to provide emotional support, explain rights, and ensure informed consent throughout this process. The medical provider is responsible for entering the kit information into the Colorado Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System, or COSAK Track, which allows professionals involved in the evidence system to update the progress of the kit. Victim-survivors can track their kit's progress through a dashboard called TrackIt by using their kit's unique barcode number [4].

#### Reporting Options

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Sexual assault victim-survivors in Colorado who obtain a SAFE can choose among several reporting pathways [5].

**a. Law enforcement report:** The victim-survivor can choose to formally report the assault to law enforcement and participate in an investigation. The victim-survivor's identifying information is attached to the case, and the SAFE kit is submitted for DNA testing. The law enforcement agency where the crime occurred is obligated to pay for the evidence portion of the SAFE.

**b. Medical report (non-investigative reporting):** The victim-survivor may choose to get a SAFE but not participate in the criminal justice system. Evidence and information are released to law enforcement with victim-survivor identifying information, but no investigation may be conducted unless a victim-survivor later decides they would like to pursue an investigation. Victim-survivors can choose whether or not their SAFE kit is tested, and the medical team that provides the SAFE can apply to the Sexual Assault Victim Emergency Payment Program (SAVE) to cover medical care costs [6].

**c. Anonymous report:** Similar to medical reporting, the victim-survivor may choose to get a SAFE but not participate in the criminal justice system. Evidence and information, however, is released to law enforcement without victim-survivor identifying information. In this case, the hospital contacts law enforcement only to pick up and store the sealed SAFE kit. No police report is filed and the kit is not tested at a laboratory unless the victim-survivor later decides they would like their kit tested. The medical team that provides the SAFE can apply to the SAVE Program to cover medical care costs.

### Law Enforcement Handoff and Chain of Custody

Once collected, the SAFE kit is transferred to law enforcement, who is responsible for maintaining the chain of custody and submitting the evidence to an accredited crime laboratory within 21 days of receiving it from a medical facility. In Colorado, this may be a Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) laboratory, a local crime laboratory, or an authorized private laboratory [see section 6C], depending on jurisdiction and case type. Law enforcement must also update the COSAK Track system as the kit progresses.

### Laboratory Testing

If a victim-survivor chooses law enforcement reporting or medical reporting, accredited laboratories analyze the kit for DNA profiles and other trace evidence. Under SB 25-304, laboratories are encouraged to meet a 60-day turnaround goal from receipt of the evidence to completion of testing. Results are uploaded into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) where matches can identify suspects or link cases across jurisdictions. Laboratories must also update the COSAK Track system as the kit progresses.

### Victim-Survivor Notification and Updates

Pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes § 24-4.1-302.5(1)(b.8), victim-survivors have the right to be notified regarding the status and location of their forensic evidence until testing and analysis are complete. SB 25-304 added to this requirement by establishing that victim-survivors have the right to be notified by law enforcement every 90 days when the law enforcement agency has not yet received the forensic evidence analysis from a forensic crime laboratory.

## Victim-Survivor Advocacy and Support

In Colorado there are many professionals who advocate for and assist victim-survivors. Victim-survivor advocates play a crucial role throughout the entire sexual assault response process - beginning at the point of disclosure and continuing through medical, investigative, and legal phases. They assist with safety planning, navigating the justice process, and accessing services. There are community-based victim advocates who can offer confidential and privileged communications, assisting with a variety of needs that arise for victim-survivors. There are also systems-based victim advocates whose conversations with victim-survivors are not confidential. Systems-based advocates provide support through law enforcement, prosecutor offices, and throughout the corrections system. Each of these professionals plays a key role in supporting the victim - survivor immediately and throughout the criminal justice process, when applicable.

## Legal Proceedings

When a victim-survivor reports a criminal case to law enforcement and the case results in an arrest, law enforcement submits the investigative findings and laboratory results - if any - to the district attorney's office for further proceedings. If a case does not result in arrest, it may or may not be presented to the district attorney depending on the individual facts and circumstances. Prosecutors review the full scope of the investigation - including any available forensic evidence - to determine whether sufficient evidence exists to support probable cause for filing criminal charges under Title 18 of the Colorado Revised Statutes.

## Post-Conviction Victim-Survivor Involvement Process

Victim-survivors in Colorado continue to have important rights and opportunities for involvement after a criminal case. Under the Colorado Victim Rights Act (VRA), victim-survivors may receive notification of key post-conviction events such as sentencing modifications, parole hearings, appeals, release decisions, and changes in the offender's custody status. Victim-survivors may also provide input during parole hearings, submit victim impact statements, and share safety concerns relevant to parole conditions. The Sex Offender Management Board (SOMB) may facilitate additional communication related to offender treatment and supervision, within statutory confidentiality limits. Victim-survivor advocates—both community-based and system-based—also play an important role during this stage by helping victim-survivors understand their rights, engage in safety planning, and navigate post-conviction processes as needed. These ongoing rights and support mechanisms acknowledge that victim-survivors' needs may continue long after the initial prosecution concludes and ensure they remain informed, supported, and empowered throughout the life of the case.

Colorado's sexual assault response involves multiple agencies - medical providers, law enforcement, forensic laboratories, prosecutors, and victim advocacy organizations - each with its own mandates and protocols. SB 25-304 represents an effort to align these entities under shared standards of timeliness, transparency, accountability, and victim-survivor-centered practice. The Board's work builds upon this foundation, seeking to identify systemic strengths, address bottlenecks, and ensure that every victim-survivor's evidence and experience receive the dignity and urgency they deserve.

## 6B. Relevant legislation and legal frameworks

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### **House Bill 13-1020:** Submission & Testing of Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Kits

This bill requires that all sexual assault evidence kits (SAFE kits) submitted as part of investigations in Colorado be forwarded to an accredited forensic laboratory for testing within 21 days, and mandates retrospective testing of previously untested kits.

### **8 CCR 1507-29:** Evidence Collection in Connection with Sexual Assaults

This regulation establishes Colorado's statewide standards for conducting Sexual Assault Forensic Exams (SAFEs) and collecting forensic evidence in sexual assault cases. It outlines requirements for trauma-informed medical care, consent, standardized evidence-collection procedures, and chain-of-custody practices. These regulations also set expectations for documentation and quality assurance to ensure consistent and accurate evidence collection across all medical facilities in the state.

### **C.R.S. § 24-33.5-113.5:** Statewide Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System

This statute directs the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) within the Department of Public Safety to establish and maintain a statewide electronic tracking system for SAFE kits. The system must allow medical facilities, law enforcement agencies, and forensic laboratories to document each stage of a kit's collection, transfer, testing, and storage. It also requires that victim-survivors be able to confidentially track the status and location of their kit through a secure online portal. The statute aims to increase transparency, support timely evidence handling, and improve coordination across agencies involved in sexual assault response.

### **HB 23-1199:** Forensic Medical Evidence Process Improvements

This bill expands on C.R.S. § 24-33.5-113.5, requiring the Colorado Department of Public Safety (DPS) to establish a secure, statewide system by June 30, 2025, enabling victim-survivors to monitor the status and location of their SAFE kit. It mandates participation from medical facilities, law enforcement agencies, and forensic laboratories in the tracking system and prohibits medical facilities from billing victim-survivors for forensic exams or associated medical treatment when related to sexual assault. It also expands the Sexual Assault Victim Emergency Payment (SAVE) Program to be able to cover forensic exams and relevant medical costs even when a victim-survivor reports to law enforcement, but no funding was included with this change.

**C.R.S. § 24-4.1-302.5(1)(b.8):** Victim Rights Act – Notification of Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence Status

This subsection of the Victim Rights Act requires law enforcement agencies to notify sexual assault victim-survivors of the status and location of their sexual assault forensic evidence. This includes notifications that the evidence has been submitted to a laboratory for testing, that the agency has received the results of the DNA analysis from the laboratory, whether a DNA sample was obtained from the analysis, and whether there are any matches to DNA profiles in state or federal databases. Victim-survivors must also be notified prior to destruction of forensic medical evidence, and they have the right to file an objection to the destruction. Victim-survivors have the right to be informed of any change in the status of the case, including if the case has been closed or reopened. These rights are in addition to the other rights afforded to all crime victims under Colorado law, such as the right to be treated with fairness, respect, and dignity, provisions requiring victims to be notified of criminal justice actions, the right to be present during certain criminal justice actions, and the right to be heard on specified actions.

**Senate Bill 25-170:** Deoxyribonucleic Acid & Sexual Assault Kit Backlog Testing & Data

The bill directs the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to use the funds specifically appropriated by the legislature to address its backlog of DNA evidence and SAFE kit testing. It also authorizes CBI to contract with accredited external laboratories to help complete this work. In addition, the bill requires CBI to create a public dashboard on the Department of Public Safety's website to provide transparent updates on the backlog. CBI must also submit progress updates to the General Assembly every 30 days from March 10, 2025, through June 30, 2026.

**Senate Bill 25-304** - Measures to Address Sexual Assault Kit Backlog

Colorado Senate Bill 25-304 was enacted to establish a centralized, coordinated response to both the handling of sexual assault forensic evidence and the improvement of the state's overall approach to sexual assault cases. The legislation attempts to address longstanding issues in the management of forensic evidence. In an effort to ensure consistent standards across all state and municipal jurisdictions, SB 25-304 establishes four key provisions:

1. Creating the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board;
2. Establishing that victim-survivors have the right to be notified by law enforcement every 90 days when the law enforcement agency has not yet received the forensic evidence analysis results from a forensic laboratory;
3. Setting a statewide 60-day turnaround target for forensic evidence analysis at all accredited forensic laboratories; and
4. Expanding public reporting and oversight obligations related to the testing of forensic evidence.

## 6C. Colorado Forensic Laboratories

Colorado relies on a mixed laboratory system that includes accredited state-operated, municipal, and private forensic laboratories. Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) operates the state's primary accredited forensic laboratory system, and has multiple regional laboratories (Arvada, Pueblo, and Grand Junction). CBI handles approximately half of all SAFE kits submitted statewide and is responsible for supporting jurisdictions without their own crime laboratories. Several local jurisdictions operate their own accredited forensic laboratories, referred to as municipal laboratories, including Denver Police Department Crime Laboratory (DCL), Colorado Springs Metro Crime Laboratory, Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Forensic Laboratory, Unified Metropolitan Forensic Crime Laboratory (Aurora, Lakewood, Arvada), and Adams County Sheriff's Office DNA laboratory. These laboratories have varying testing capacities, primarily processing evidence for their own jurisdictions. Finally, accredited private laboratories are an option for analysis on a limited, case-by-case basis - especially for backlog reduction or overflow situations. Colorado's system benefits from this diverse laboratory network that provides multiple access points for forensic testing. However, this mixed system can also lead to variability in capacity, turnaround times, data transparency, and oversight.

Please note that the numbers in the table below are approximations – the Board acknowledges that laboratories use different terminology and tracking systems, leading to lack of standard data tracking across the system. Still, this table is valuable to provide context surrounding capacity and caseload.

Table 1. Colorado Forensic Laboratory Sexual Assault Forensic Evidence (SAFE) Kit Processing Overview (as of November 1, 2025).

<b>Forensic Laboratory</b>	<b>Average SAFE Kit Turnaround Time</b>	<b>Number of forensic analysts processing SAFE kits<sup>4</sup></b>
CBI	320 days	18
Denver Police Department Crime Lab	180 days	19
Jefferson County Sheriff's Office Forensic Laboratory	48.3 days	4
Adams County Sheriff's Office DNA laboratory	60-90 days	4
Colorado Springs Metro Crime Laboratory <sup>5</sup>	Not accepting SAFE kits at this time	2
Unified Metropolitan Forensic Crime Laboratory	Unknown*	Unknown*

\* The Board was given a short amount of time to connect with stakeholders, and a response was not received by this preliminary report publication deadline.

<sup>4</sup> Note: "Forensic analysts" is an umbrella term that may include evidence-screening personnel, DNA scientists, technical specialists, and other laboratory staff who contribute to different phases of sexual assault forensic testing. Each laboratory structures its workforce differently, and analysts frequently divide their time among multiple crime types. For this reason, the numbers presented here offer a high-level snapshot and should be interpreted with caution.

<sup>5</sup> The Colorado Springs Metro Crime Laboratory and other laboratories represented in the table are attempting to fill several forensic analyst vacancies. However, the hiring process is difficult and filling forensic analyst positions is increasingly harder with municipal salaries.

## 7. SWOT ANALYSIS: BOARD INITIAL FOCUS AREAS

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The Board's initial review of current protocols, standards, and training practices revealed three focus areas for continued examination: Victim-Survivor Support and Experience, Training for Professionals, and Evidence Collection, Testing, and Analysis. The Board chose to use a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) framework to help guide its work under each focus area and to identify priorities for the upcoming year. Importantly, because the Board had limited time to conduct a comprehensive system review, the opportunities outlined below represent potential areas for deeper exploration, not formal recommendations. These opportunities highlight where the Board intends to focus additional analysis and stakeholder engagement moving forward and may ultimately inform future recommendations once the Board has had sufficient time to examine these issues in greater depth. Additionally, these lists are not comprehensive, and the Board looks forward to reviewing additional components of the sexual assault response system moving forward.

### I. Victim-Survivor Support & Experience

The Board acknowledges and honors the courage victim-survivors demonstrate when they navigate criminal justice systems. Regretfully, victim-survivors may be subjected to secondary trauma when engaging with law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and other responding professionals. Sexual assaults impact almost every aspect of a victim-survivor's life, including their families, friends, and the communities in which they live. The need for on-going support and services is great, and that need may be elevated for people who have historically been marginalized and face systemic barriers. Some victim-survivors may be interested in alternative paths to justice. Criminal justice systems should make every effort to do no further harm.

#### Strengths

Colorado's current victim-survivor-support landscape benefits from several established programs, protections, and resources that contribute to trauma-informed response:

- **Strong statewide victim advocacy network.**

Colorado has a robust network of over 200 community-based and system-based advocacy organizations that provide crisis intervention, safety planning, legal assistance, and long-term support to sexual assault victim-survivors.

- **Victim-survivor-accessible forensic evidence tracking (TrackIt).**

Colorado's TrackIt portal - part of the COSAK Tracking System - allows victim-survivors to track the status of their SAFE kit independently and confidentially, increasing transparency and control over their process. TrackIt also provides resources for victim-survivors, law enforcement contact information, and relevant statutory information.

- **Statutory victim-survivor notification protections.**

There are specific rights afforded under Colorado Revised Statutes § 24-4.1-302.5(1)(b.8) to victim-survivors who have forensic medical evidence collected, requiring law enforcement agencies to notify victim-survivors of the status and location of their forensic medical evidence [see legislation in section 6B]. SB25-304 added to these rights by requiring law enforcement to notify victim-survivors every 90 days when the agency has not received the results of the forensic evidence DNA analysis from the laboratory, which serves as notice to the victim-survivor that there is no new information to share regarding the DNA analysis.

- **Availability of SANE/SAFE programs in many hospitals and clinics.**

In Colorado, there are about 40 SANE/SAFE programs providing specialized, trauma-informed medical forensic exams that improve both the victim-survivor experience and the quality of evidence collected [7]. Around 10% of these programs are in community health centers, and UCHealth provides TeleSANE support to 16 sites across the state. Additionally, of the 19 child advocacy centers (CACs) in the state, 15 provide SANE/SAFE services on-site.

- **Statewide evidence-collection standards (pursuant to 8 CCR 1507-29).**

Colorado's Sexual Assault Evidence Collection protocol promotes consistency across the state in evidence collection, informed consent, documentation, and trauma-informed care.

- **Access to Crime Victim Compensation without a law enforcement report.**

Colorado's Crime Victim Compensation (CVC) program allows victim-survivors to seek financial support for medical care, counseling, lost wages, and other expenses without being required to report to law enforcement when there is a forensic examination completed. This removes a significant barrier for individuals who do not wish to engage with the criminal justice system, while still ensuring access to essential services and support.

### Weaknesses & Threats

Despite progress, substantial gaps continue to impact victim-survivor experience and are barriers for improvement in Colorado:

- **Limited SANE/SAFE access, particularly in rural communities.**

Many rural and frontier regions lack local, in-person SANE/SAFE programs; victim-survivors often face long travel distances, delayed care, or reduced options for evidence collection. Additionally, TeleSANE programs exist but are insufficiently funded, understaffed, or underutilized, leaving many regions without timely access to trained examiners. In many settings, the challenge is insufficient structural support, dedicated time, or organizational prioritization to allow medical professionals to complete and maintain specialized training to sustain a robust forensic medical workforce.

Figure 1 below is a map of the available Colorado SANE/SAFE programs:

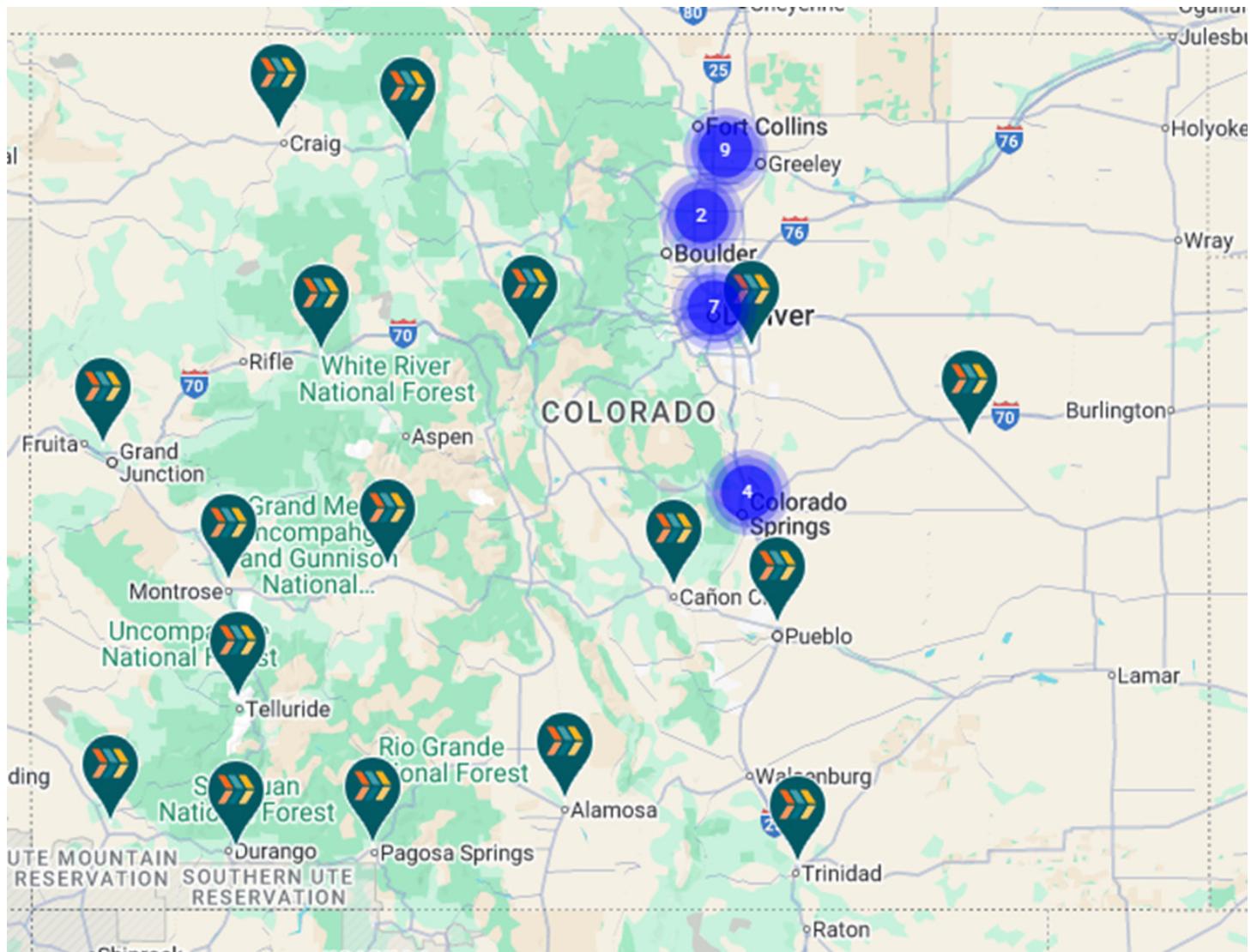


Figure 1. Credit: YouHaveTheRight: [youhavetherightco.org](http://youhavetherightco.org)

- **Fragmented public communication and awareness about available resources for victim-survivors.**

Although the YouHaveTheRight website [7] provides a centralized location for victim-survivors and professionals to find comprehensive, region-specific information about SANE/SAFE availability, advocacy services, legal rights, reporting options, and community support resources, there seems to be a lack of awareness about this resource among some law enforcement and victim-survivor support professionals. This lack of awareness contributes to inconsistent messaging and confusion for victim-survivors about what services are available to them based on their location, reporting choice, and individual needs.

- **Challenges with victim-survivor notification processes.**

Although the 90-day notification requirement in SB 25-304 standardizes expectations for regular updates to victim-survivors regarding the status of SAFE kits, its fixed timeline is not fully aligned with other provisions of the Victim Rights Act, which do not prescribe specific notification intervals. Some law enforcement agencies have reported varying levels of infrastructure and staffing to deliver notifications effectively. Additionally, some victim-survivors may prefer fewer updates or may wish to opt out, yet there is limited guidance for law enforcement agencies on how to clearly communicate opt-out options. Together, these factors contribute to uneven implementation and varied survivor experiences across jurisdictions.<sup>6</sup>

- **Lack of integrated public safety data across jurisdictions.**

Colorado does not have a unified system for capturing and integrating key sexual-assault-related data—such as reported assaults, assault type categorization, district attorney filing decisions, or case outcomes. Most Colorado law enforcement agencies, including CBI and the Denver Police Department [8,9], do track and report violent crime data like sexual assaults, but there are often discrepancies in data between tracking systems. Fragmented data systems limit statewide situational awareness, hinder trend analysis, and constrain the ability to identify gaps or emerging public safety concerns.

- **Inconsistent guidance regarding the release of medical information related to SAFE exams.**

There appears to be misunderstanding among medical providers, attorneys, and law enforcement about what information can be shared during a sexual assault investigation - particularly following recent federal guidance related to the protection of reproductive health information. This lack of clarity can result in delays, inconsistent practices, and the need for repeated requests for victim-survivor consent, which may increase stress for victim-survivors.

- **Funding constraints for victim-survivor services and support.**

Victim-survivor service programs continue to face uncertain and inadequate funding, which threatens the availability of advocacy, continuity of care for victim-survivors, and rural service capacity.

- **Limited availability and awareness of culturally specific victim-survivor support services.**

Culturally specific organizations - which play an essential role in serving communities that experience disproportionate rates of violence - represent a small portion of Colorado's victim-survivor service landscape and are often underfunded or understaffed. As a result, many underrepresented and historically marginalized populations face barriers to accessing culturally responsive, language-appropriate, and community-rooted support.

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<sup>6</sup> Some Board members are engaged in ongoing policy work related to this issue; however, their individual efforts do not represent or reflect the position of the full Board.

- **Drug-dispensing policy misalignments.**

Current statutory language allows hospitals to dispense a 7–28-day supply of medications for STI prophylaxis. However, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is dispensed only in 30-day bottles, creating operational and financial challenges for pharmacies and medical facilities, which may need to discard unused doses.

- **Need for trauma-informed training and comprehensive sexual assault response education among law enforcement and other responding professionals (See Section II: Training for Professionals).**

### Opportunities

The Board has identified several opportunities that warrant focused review in the future to strengthen statewide victim-survivor support and promote more consistent, trauma-informed practices across the system:

- **Strengthen institutional and organizational support for SANE/SAFE programs, especially in rural communities.**

The Board will explore strategies to enhance hospital and clinic commitment to sustaining SANE/SAFE programs, including identifying ways to support the time, staffing, and operational capacity required for medical professionals to complete and maintain specialized forensic training. This may include reviewing funding pathways, examining models used by successful programs, and assessing how hospitals can better integrate sexual-assault response into organizational priorities. Increasing institutional commitment could help ensure a stable forensic medical workforce and more consistent access to forensic medical exams, especially in rural and frontier communities.

- **Improve statewide awareness and utilization of current resource hubs.**

The Board will explore strategies to increase awareness and consistent use of resources hubs, such as the YouHaveTheRight website and the TrackIt portal, among law enforcement, medical providers, advocacy organizations, and other professionals who interact with victim-survivors. Improving training, outreach, and integration of these resources into standard practice could help ensure that victim-survivors receive clear, accurate, and region-specific information about available services, regardless of where or how they disclose an assault.

- **Review and clarify victim-survivor notification processes.**

The Board intends to further examine opportunities to improve consistency, clarity, and victim-survivor-centeredness in the evidence notification process, including clarifying opt-out mechanisms for victim-survivors and reviewing law enforcement agency capacity and needs to support timely and sensitive communication.

- **Evaluate technology solutions and funding needed for statewide data integration across disparate public safety systems.**

The Board may review opportunities to allocate funding toward the implementation of data-integration tools capable of aggregating key metrics across disparate systems, such as reported assaults, assault type, laboratory turnaround times, criminal case filings, and case outcomes across jurisdictions. Improved integration across disparate systems could increase transparency, strengthen public safety, and support backlog-prevention efforts.

- **Explore improved follow-up care and support for victim-survivors.**

The Board will explore strategies to enhance statewide availability of services such as sexually transmitted infection testing, medication access, mental health care, and post-exam medical follow-up, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Recognizing that the impacts of sexual assault extend well beyond the initial report or investigative phase, the Board also intends to examine ways to strengthen longer-term support for victim-survivors, including access to ongoing counseling, safety planning resources, and assistance navigating post-charging processes. Expanding these supports may help address the prolonged and evolving needs many victim-survivors experience throughout their healing journeys.

- **Clarify guidance regarding the release of medical information related to SAFE exams.**

The Board will explore opportunities to provide clearer guidance around the release of SAFE kit records from medical facilities to district attorneys and law enforcement, including how these policies interact with reproductive health privacy protections. Clear, statewide guidance would help ensure that medical facilities understand that releasing SAFE exam documentation for sexual assault investigations is distinct from disclosures related to reproductive health care, and that appropriate privacy protections remain in place. Ensuring prosecutors do not have to continue obtaining additional consent from victim-survivors to access records will limit re-traumatization of victim-survivors.

- **Advocate for sustained funding for victim-survivor services.**

The Board will continue reviewing how dedicated state appropriations, grant programs, or funding mechanisms could support advocacy services, rural and frontier victim-survivor resources, long-term support services, and other critical components of victim-survivor care.

- **Expand support and raise awareness for culturally specific victim-survivor service organizations.**

The Board will explore opportunities to strengthen funding, capacity, and statewide reach of culturally specific programs that serve marginalized groups and communities experiencing disproportionate rates of violence. Expanding support for these organizations could help address existing service gaps and ensure that victim-survivor resources are accessible and equitable across Colorado's diverse populations.

## II. Training For Professionals

### Strengths

Colorado benefits from several existing training resources and system-level initiatives that support trauma-informed, evidence-based responses to sexual assault:

- Peace Officer Standards & Training (POST) Academy redesign emphasizing competency-based, active learning.**

Colorado POST is undertaking a comprehensive redesign of its basic academy training model, shifting from time-based requirements (e.g., a 6-hour mandate for a certain topic) to a competency-based, threaded curriculum rooted in active learning. This approach prioritizes experiential practice rather than lecture-based instruction and has the potential to significantly improve how law enforcement is trained and ultimately responds to sexual assault cases. The Board looks forward to collaborating with POST on the delivery and content of the trainings.

- Ending Violence Against Women Project (EVAW) trainings.**

The Ending Violence Against Women Project provides multidisciplinary trainings across Colorado, with a particular focus on rural communities. Each year, the project trains approximately 500 participants for free - primarily law enforcement officers, but also prosecutors, victim-survivor advocates, and others working with victim-survivors or suspects. These trainings are designed to improve participants' skills in interacting with crime victim-survivors, strengthen officers' ability to connect victim-survivors with advocates and prosecutors, and enhance coordination across disciplines.

- Strong SANE/SAFE and SART training programs.**

Colorado features a comprehensive training infrastructure for medical and forensic examiners, including the 64-hour didactic course offered by the Colorado SANE/SAFE Project (hosted by UCHealth), clinical skills labs, and web-based modules. These training pipelines support the development of certified examiners in both urban and rural settings and help ensure that medical forensic care is aligned with evidence-collection standards and trauma-informed practices.

Multidisciplinary teams (commonly referred to as Sexual Assault Response Teams, or SARTs) exist across various judicial districts in Colorado, meeting on a monthly, bimonthly, or quarterly basis. Many SART meetings include a dedicated training topic or presentation, offering space for cross-disciplinary training and collaborative discussion. These meetings also function as a key mechanism for disseminating legislative updates and emerging best practices, enabling agencies and professionals to stay current with information that directly affects their work with victim-survivors.

## Weaknesses & Threats

Despite existing resources, Colorado faces several gaps and barriers that limit the consistency and quality of training across systems:

- Varied SANE/SAFE/TeleSANE training capacity and workforce shortages.**

Colorado faces persistent challenges in ensuring consistent engagement with SANE/SAFE training programs in rural and frontier regions. When training programs are available, many nurses and medical professionals lack the time, bandwidth, and institutional support needed to complete the extensive didactic and clinical requirements. Although TeleSANE has the potential to expand access, current training capacity and staffing limitations prevent it from fully reaching underserved areas.

- Need for trauma-informed training and comprehensive sexual assault response education across systems.**

Some law enforcement, victim advocates, prosecutors, and other responding professionals do not consistently receive training in trauma-informed care or education on the full sexual assault response process, including what victim-survivors experience after reporting and what resources are available to them. Without this foundational knowledge, professionals may struggle to explain next steps, set expectations, or provide accurate information - contributing to victim-survivor distrust, re-traumatization, and disengagement from the process.

- Gaps in training curriculum for law enforcement.**

The Board has identified gaps in training curriculum for law enforcement in relation to sexual assault response, including the lack of required ongoing training for sexual assault or its nuanced cases (e.g., child sexual abuse). Law enforcement agencies also report gaps in specialized training related to sexual assault evidence handling, storage, and submission - issues that directly affect case progression and victim-survivor trust.

## Opportunities

The Board has identified several opportunities that warrant focused review in the future to strengthen statewide training infrastructure and promote more consistent, trauma-informed practices:

- Strengthen SANE/SAFE training capacity and curriculum.**

The Board will explore statewide SANE/SAFE training capacity, clinical placement opportunities, and models that support medical professionals in completing the extensive didactic and clinical requirements, especially in rural and frontier regions. Recognizing that workforce shortages and burnout significantly limit the number of trained examiners, the Board will also consider how to incorporate self-care, resiliency, and secondary trauma-mitigation skills into training curricula. Improving both engagement with training and the long-term sustainability of the forensic nursing workforce may help ensure more consistent availability of SANE/SAFE across Colorado.

- **Comprehensive review of law-enforcement training requirements and curriculum.**

The Board has the opportunity to collaborate with POST to examine sexual assault-related content and delivery in their law enforcement academy redesign. The Board also aims to review requirements for field and in-service training to ensure evidence-based, trauma-informed, and victim-survivor-centered practices are consistently taught. This might include the exploration of opportunities to enhance evidence collection and storage training for law enforcement.

- **Expand and improve trauma-informed training and education for law enforcement.**

The Board aims to examine opportunities to add and improve trauma-informed training and communication standards for law enforcement. This also may include emphasizing consistent messaging about victim-survivor rights, the sexual assault response process, and available supports.

- **Expand trauma-informed training opportunities for judges, prosecutors, and victim advocates.**

The Board will explore mechanisms for implementing targeted training in trauma-informed communication, forensic evidence, and victim-survivor rights, which could improve consistency and reduce systemic barriers across the criminal-legal system.

- **Conduct a comprehensive review of Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs) statewide.**

The Board intends to examine the current landscape of SARTs across Colorado to assess where these multidisciplinary teams are functioning effectively, where gaps exist, and where additional support or establishment of new teams may be warranted. A clearer understanding of SART effectiveness across jurisdictions will allow the Board to identify areas for improvement, promote consistency, and identify whether communities would benefit from SART expansion.

### III. Evidence Collection, Testing, and Analysis

#### Strengths

Colorado's infrastructure for sexual assault forensic evidence handling includes several strong foundations that support transparency, standardization, and statewide coordination:

- **Colorado Sexual Assault Kit Tracking System (COSAK Track & TrackIt).**

COSAK Track provides a centralized, statewide platform for documenting the movement and status of SAFE kits across medical facilities, law enforcement, and forensic laboratories. The companion TrackIt portal allows victim-survivors to confidentially view the status and location of their kits, enhancing transparency and trust in the process.

- **Backlog reduction progress and public tracking at CBI.**

CBI has made measurable progress in reducing its evidence backlog this year, which has been supported by legislative action, resource allocation, and operational improvements. CBI maintains a public-facing dashboard that tracks backlog numbers, average kit turnaround times, and testing progress - offering visibility that helps inform policymakers and the public.

- **Governor's Executive Order establishing the CBI Forensic Services Committee.**

The 2024 Executive Order, B 2024 002, established a state-level committee charged with identifying deficiencies and improvement opportunities in forensic practices at CBI. This committee provides added oversight and accountability and helps elevate systemic issues that affect evidence handling and testing across the state.

- **Legislative commitment to addressing sexual assault response in Colorado.**

State lawmakers have prioritized backlog reduction, forensic processing, and improvements to the sexual assault response system as a whole through initiatives such as SB 25-304, SB 25-170, and other statutory reforms - demonstrating sustained commitment to improving the system for victim-survivors.

#### Weaknesses and Threats

Despite meaningful progress, several systemic challenges continue to strain Colorado's evidence collection and testing infrastructure, contributing to delays and inefficiencies:

- **Limited publicly available aggregate sexual assault evidence data from municipal crime laboratories.**

Municipal crime laboratories do not currently share public-facing datapoints such as their case volume, backlog (if one exists), or sexual assault evidence turnaround times. This could limit statewide visibility into processing capacity and impede efforts to identify systemwide gaps. Each municipal laboratory uses different internal tracking mechanisms and systems, making one system-wide public-facing tracker difficult to implement. Additionally, conversations with municipal laboratory representatives suggested that there is a need for clarification of terminology such as "backlog" and "sexual assault kits" in order to provide system-wide clarity and standardization before sharing data.

- **Staffing shortages across laboratories.**

Consistently across laboratories in Colorado, there is a chronic shortage of qualified forensic scientists and analysts contributing to a variety of bottlenecks in the evidence testing and analysis process. Recruiting, hiring, and retaining staff is a persistent challenge, particularly when positions are grant-funded or lack long-term sustainability. Training new scientists can take 2-3 years, and often requires experienced scientists to shift time away from active casework in order to provide that training. Another constraint on the time and capacity of local forensic laboratories is the requirement for scientists to testify in person during trials. Testifying can require hours or even full days of travel and appearing in court, which impacts their ability to engage in laboratory testing.

- **Forensic Services Committee authority limited to CBI.**

The current Forensic Services Committee established by the Governor's executive order only applies oversight to CBI, not to municipal laboratories. This could create uneven accountability and limit statewide quality assurance.

- **Lack of funding allocated to municipal laboratories to test SAFE kits.**

Although HB13-1020 required all medical and investigative-reported SAFE kits to be tested, municipal laboratories were not allocated specific funding to support this endeavor. Additionally, amidst the CBI SAFE kit backlog, hundreds of SAFE kits were returned to municipal laboratories for testing. In March of 2025, the Joint Budget Committee recommended that stipends should be allocated for each SAFE kit tested by municipal laboratories for a certain period of time, but this measure failed.

- **Need for improved interdisciplinary coordination and standardized Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) across agencies.**

Coordination between hospitals, SANE/SAFE programs, law enforcement, prosecutors, and laboratories varies widely across jurisdictions. Many agencies lack formalized Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), especially regarding SAFE kit handling, which can impede communication, delay evidence transfer, and create inconsistent procedures.

### Opportunities

The Board has identified several opportunities that warrant focused review in the future to strengthen Colorado's evidence collection and management infrastructure:

- **Review of evidence-transfer and notification timelines between medical facilities, law enforcement, and forensic laboratories.**

The Board has identified SAFE kit transfer timelines between agencies as a potential area for improvement and plans to examine whether additional clarity or adjustments could reduce delays. Currently, law enforcement is required to submit a SAFE kit to a laboratory for testing within 21 days of receipt from a medical facility. There is no timeframe requirement, however, for medical professionals to notify law enforcement that a kit has been collected, or for law enforcement to pick up a kit from a medical facility, which can contribute to unnecessary delays in the submission of the kit to a forensic laboratory. The Board would like to engage with rural and frontier stakeholders about their timeline capacities before recommending requirements on transfer windows, to ensure feasibility and prevent undue stress on the system.

- **Explore the terminology, workflows, and potential limitations for municipal laboratories to consider development of publicly available dashboards for aggregate sexual assault evidence data.**

The Board will consider the ability for municipal laboratories to publish aggregate sexual assault evidence processing metrics similar to CBI's public-facing dashboard. The Board was asked by stakeholders to explore the feasibility of a 'statewide evidence tracker' to promote collaboration and resource sharing between laboratories. Initial conversations with municipal laboratories and CBI, however, indicated that this might not be possible due to foundational differences in funding mechanisms, data tracking systems, and terminology discrepancies across laboratories. The Board would like to collaborate with municipal laboratories to explore the possibility of each laboratory independently publishing their own aggregate data for public-access, noting the importance of establishing standardized definitions of requested information to limit public confusion.

- **Evaluate long-term investment needs for laboratory staffing, capacity, and resources, and facilitate a statewide workload and resource analysis.**

The Board will review how funding streams, recruitment pipelines, and workforce incentives might support a more sustainable forensic science workforce and testing infrastructure across the state. This includes reviewing the potential role of stipends, grants, or appropriations to help laboratories manage kits and increase processing capacity. A workload and resource analysis of laboratory capacity, staffing, equipment, and workflow might be needed to better understand what resources are necessary to consistently achieve a 60-day SAFE kit DNA analysis turnaround at each lab. The Board will also continue examining the outsourcing of SAFE kits to private laboratories as an effective short-term strategy, acknowledging that this approach may not be feasible or cost-effective as a long-term solution.

- **Improve interagency communication through standardized MOU templates.**

The Board will explore developing template MOUs to support consistent collaboration between hospitals, law enforcement, forensic laboratories, advocacy organizations, district attorneys, and SANE/SAFE programs—particularly to support evidence chain of custody and rural SANE/SAFE expansion and coordination.

## 8. ADMINISTRATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE CONSIDERATION

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Since its first meeting, the Board has been focused on the SWOT analysis for each of its primary focus areas. The Board believes that it is premature to make substantive recommendations as to the focus areas before more comprehensive review and stakeholder outreach can be conducted. However, during its short tenure it has become clear to the Board that a few opportunities to improve Board functioning are necessary. As such, the recommendations in this report are focused on these procedural and administrative improvements. The Board is diligently working to carefully identify substantive recommendations for its next report.

### **1. Addition of a Municipal Crime Laboratory Representative to the Board**

To strengthen statewide coordination and ensure that forensic laboratory perspectives are fully represented, the Board encourages the General Assembly to consider amending statute to create an additional statutory Board seat for a municipal crime laboratory representative. Municipal laboratories process around half of Colorado's sexual assault kits, but these laboratories currently have no designated voting representation on the Board.

Adding a municipal laboratory representative would:

- Provide essential insight into the operational realities, resource needs, and constraints of non-CBI forensic laboratories;
- Improve statewide alignment in evidence-collection, testing, and tracking practices;
- Support the Board's mandate to review the effectiveness of protocols and identify systemwide gaps;
- Enhance communication between state and municipal laboratory systems; and
- Ensure that recommendations developed by the Board reflect the full diversity of Colorado's forensic infrastructure.

The Board therefore recommends that the legislature evaluate the feasibility and benefits of amending statute to establish a dedicated municipal laboratory seat.

## **2. Addition of Two Designated Victim-Survivor Representatives Seats to the Board**

The Board encourages the General Assembly to consider amending statute to establish two additional victim-survivor representative seats - one representing a rural/frontier community and one representing a metro/urban community - to ensure a broader and more equitable reflection of lived experience across Colorado. While the Board currently benefits from the insight of members who are victim-survivors, adding dedicated victim-survivor representatives from both rural/frontier and metro/urban regions would broaden the depth and diversity of victim-survivor perspectives informing the Board's work.

Adding two designated victim-survivor seats would:

- Strengthen adherence to the Board's statutory mandate under SB 25-304 to review the effectiveness of current protocols, identify gaps, and recommend improvements grounded in victim-survivor-centered practice. Victim-survivor perspectives are essential to understanding how statutory requirements function in real-world settings.
- Enhance the Board's ability to assess statewide victim-survivor experience by ensuring representation of both metro victim-survivors - who often interact with large, complex systems - and rural victim-survivors, who frequently face limited access to services, long travel distances, and fewer confidentiality protections in smaller communities.
- Ensure the Board's recommendations are informed by lived experience across diverse communities, allowing the Board to better identify barriers, unintended consequences of policy, and disparities in access to trauma-informed care.

Given the centrality of victim-survivor experience to the Board's statutory charge, the Board recommends the legislature evaluate the feasibility and benefits of creating two dedicated victim-survivor seats to enhance the diversity of victim-survivor input and support more comprehensive, victim-survivor-centered oversight statewide.

## **3. Renaming the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board**

To improve accuracy and public understanding of the Board's statutory responsibilities, the Board recommends that the General Assembly consider revising the Board's name to better reflect the full scope of its work. Although the Board is currently titled the Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board, its statutory mandate under SB 25-304 extends far beyond forensic evidence review. The Board is charged with evaluating the effectiveness of the entire sexual assault response system - including victim-survivor access to care, reporting pathways, interagency coordination, statewide notification standards, training needs, and systemic gaps affecting victim-survivor experience.

The current title may unintentionally suggest a narrow focus on forensic medical evidence rather than holistic system review. This might create confusion among stakeholders, particularly given the presence of the Forensic Services Committee, which is specifically examining forensic evidence practices at CBI, and the Forensic Compliance Team, which is a multidisciplinary stakeholder group committed to ensuring Colorado's compliance with medical and anonymous forensic exam provisions. The Board does not want to discourage victim-survivors, service providers, or community stakeholders from engaging with this work under the assumption that it is limited to laboratory or evidence issues.

A more accurate and accessible name, such as the "Colorado Sexual Assault Response Review Board," would:

- Better reflect the Board's statutory duties to review protocols, standards, training practices, and victim-survivor-centered implementation across the full continuum of sexual assault response;
- Strengthen transparency and encourage broader public engagement;
- Reduce confusion surrounding the roles of this Board, the CBI Forensic Services Committee, and the Forensic Compliance Team;
- Signal to victim-survivors that their full experience - not just the forensic evidence component - is central to the Board's work.

Because clear communication and accessibility are integral to victim-survivor trust and system accountability, the Board recommends that the legislature evaluate an updated Board name that aligns with its statutory mission and avoids confusion with other state forensic review bodies.

#### **4. Sustained Funding for the Board Beyond 2026**

To fulfill its statutory mandate and ensure long-term improvements to Colorado's sexual assault response system, the Board recommends that the General Assembly consider extending and securing funding for the Board's operations beyond its current 2026 allocation. Under SB 25-304, the Board is responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of current protocols, standards, laws, and training practices, examining data and system needs, identifying statewide gaps, and making recommendations for improving the sexual assault response system, including the handling of forensic medical evidence. Despite early progress, the Board's first year of work has demonstrated that a much longer runway is necessary to complete a comprehensive, systemwide review and to support meaningful, victim-survivor-centered reforms. Ensuring continuous funding past 2026 would:

- Support the Board's ability to produce comprehensive, data-driven recommendations;
- Enable ongoing stakeholder engagement, including victim-survivor input and consultation with experts across disciplines;

- Allow the Board to monitor implementation of reforms and assess their real-world impact on victim-survivors and system actors;
- Promote sustained improvements to Colorado's sexual assault response system, strengthening both public safety and victim-survivor experience.

The Board therefore recommends that the legislature evaluate options to extend funding beyond 2026—whether through direct appropriation, grant authority, or integration into existing state programs—to ensure that this critical systemwide review can be completed effectively and responsibly.

## 9. BOARD FUTURE

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The Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review Board will continue its work beyond this preliminary reporting period in alignment with its statutory mandate to monitor, evaluate, and improve Colorado's response to sexual assault. Because the Board was convened in August 2025 and had only a short period to conduct initial meetings, review materials, and engage stakeholders before the preliminary report deadline, it was not possible to conduct a complete evaluation of the system in order to develop substantive recommendations at this stage. The Board recognizes these limitations and looks forward to dedicating the 2026 calendar year to deeper review, expanded stakeholder engagement, and development of more comprehensive recommendations that reflect the complexity of Colorado's sexual assault response landscape.

The Board recognizes that meaningful, durable reform requires continued engagement with those most affected by the system. Going forward, the Board intends to maintain and expand outreach to subject-matter experts and agencies, strengthen mechanisms for incorporating victim-survivor voice and lived experience, and ensure victim-survivor-centered implementation of statutory provisions.

Consistent with its practice in 2025, the Board anticipates continuing regular full Board meetings accompanied by working-group sessions in 2026, held virtually to maximize statewide participation and public accessibility under the Open-Meetings Law. Pursuant to statute, following this preliminary report due December 15, 2025, the Board is required to submit annual reports to the General Assembly on or before November 1 of each subsequent year. Through this ongoing work, the Board intends to remain a sustained, accountable, and victim-survivor-focused body that supports continuous improvement in Colorado's sexual assault response system.

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## **APPENDIX A:** Colorado Sexual Assault Forensic Medical Evidence Review

Board members:

- The executive director of the Colorado district attorneys' council or their designee: Jessica Dotter, Colorado District Attorneys' Council
- A representative of a statewide nonprofit organization that offers training and expert advice to sexual assault programs: Gina Lopez, Colorado Coalition Against Sexual Assault
- A representative of a statewide nonprofit organization that provides legal assistance to victims of sexual assault: Emily Tofte Nestaval, Rocky Mountain Victim Law Center
- A representative of a statewide organization that provides training and technical assistance for medical forensic exams: Megan McCulley, UCHealth Memorial Hospital Central
- A representative of a statewide association of chiefs of police: John Koch, Colorado Springs Police Department
- A representative of a statewide association of sheriffs: Steve Nowlin, Montezuma County Sheriff
- Three representatives from organizations that provide services or advocate for communities that experience disproportionate rates of sexual assault: Ashley Jellison, Colorado Children's Alliance; Hanni Raley, The Arc of Aurora and Think Change; Faith Koehler, Archuleta County Public Health Department
- Up to three members, at the discretion of the attorney general, whose contributions the attorney general determines would be valuable to the work of the review board: Laura Patlan, The Blue Bench; Natalie Seils, Department of Public Safety and Survivor Advocate; Elizabeth Wilmer, Office of Victim Assistance, University of Colorado
- A representative of the Division of Criminal Justice in the Department of Public Safety who has oversight of the statewide sexual assault evidence collection kit tracking system created in section 24-33.5-113.5: Jill Nore, Department of Public Safety Division of Criminal Justice
- A representative of the Division of Criminal Justice in the Department of Public Safety who has oversight of federal and state victim service funding and victim rights compliance: Kelly Kissell, Department of Public Safety Division of Criminal Justice
- The Attorney General's designee: Janet Drake, Deputy Attorney General, Criminal Justice