

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
September 14, 2010

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
"Rape In The United States: The Chronic Failure To Report And Investigate Rape Cases"
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I want to thank Senator Specter for holding this important hearing to draw attention to the low reporting rates for the crime of rape. Sexual violence destroys lives and communities, and we must do more to prevent it.

Today we will examine disturbing reports that, despite the important progress we have made to ensure justice for rape victims, in too many jurisdictions, this horrific crime goes unreported and its perpetrators are often left unpunished. We must do better to understand why that is, and what we can do to make victims feel safe to come forward and report sexual assault.

Our Nation has made remarkable progress in the last two decades in responding to sexual violence. Today, there is no question that domestic violence and sexual assault are crimes, and we have dramatically improved the support systems for survivors of this abuse. We have responded with better laws, better law enforcement training, and coordinated community support systems. We are improving, but as this hearing makes clear, we must do more.

We recently celebrated the 15th Anniversary of the Violence Against Women Act, a watershed law that changed the way we address sexual violence in our country. I am proud of the work we have done in Congress to improve that law over the years, and I am looking forward to working with Director Susan Carbon of the Office on Violence Against Women and others to make it even stronger as we prepare for reauthorization in 2011.

I am also working hard, along with Senator Klobuchar, Senator Franken, Senator Grassley, and others to improve the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Reduction Act, which authorizes significant funding to reduce the backlog of untested rape kits, so that victims need not live in fear while kits languish in storage. I have heard from the Justice Department, the states, law enforcement, and victims' advocates that Debbie Smith grants have led to significant and meaningful backlog reduction, and to justice for victims, in jurisdictions across the country. Again, the system is improving, but we can and must do more to ensure that DNA evidence is processed and tested in a timely and efficient manner, and that the perpetrators of these horrific crimes are held accountable for their actions.

It is time to strengthen the steps we take to prevent violence against women and children and its devastating costs and consequences. One important step in reducing this violence is providing

the support survivors need to feel safe to come forward and report these crimes. I look forward to hearing from today's witnesses about how we can work together to get to the bottom of this problem. The time to solve this problem is now.