



## Office of the Texas Governor Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force

Greetings All!

As we wind down our work for 2021 and begin planning for 2022, we wanted to take a few moments to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all Task Force members, working group members, subject matter experts and state agency partners who contributed to our work this year. What an incredible group of people collaborating to create meaningful change on behalf of survivors!

We would like to especially acknowledge and thank the survivors of sexual violence, and family members of victims/survivors, who have participated in Task Force meetings, discussions, and document reviews throughout the year. We are deeply grateful for your voices. We strive every day to honor your experiences, and we hold ourselves accountable to making actionable progress alongside you on behalf of all of those impacted by sexual violence in Texas.

We also wanted to share some memorable moments and milestones from 2021 – just the *second* year of the Governor's Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force! From informing new survivor-centered legislation, to submitting our first formal recommendations for improved law enforcement sexual assault training, and kicking off two brand-new working groups, 2021 has been an action-packed year focused on delivering critical system improvements for Texas' sexual assault survivors.

- House Bill 2706 and House Bill 2462, containing all of the SASTF's 2020 policy recommendations, passed with unanimous bipartisan agreement in the 87<sup>th</sup> Session and were signed by Governor Abbott.
- The Task Force held over 80 meetings focused on a variety of topics tied to mandated deliverables and targeting improvements for Texas' child and adult survivors.
- We integrated survivors and family survivors into working groups to ensure that people who have been directly impacted by sexual violence are contributing to SASTF discussions and recommendations.
- We created a Prosecutors Working Group, and a Campus Working Group.
- We submitted over 900 comments and recommendations to the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement (TCOLE) and the Texas Municipal Police

Association (TMPA) to improve sexual assault-related training for law enforcement officers.

- We initiated a pilot project related to sexual assault evidence kit tracking data with key partners including the Houston Police Department, the Houston Forensic Science Center, and the Department of Public Safety Crime Lab (Track-Kit).
- We developed new trauma-informed and safety planning frameworks to guide Texas' trauma-informed, survivor-centered response to sexual violence.
- We made substantial progress on a survivor resources portal which will be launched as part of the OOG website in Spring of 2022.
- University of Texas - Austin's Institute on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (IDVSA) completed a research project on behalf of the SASTF, interviewing 70 sexual assault survivors to determine their experience seeking and utilizing sexual assault-specific services in Texas, as well as identifying unmet needs. Findings from this project will be shared with the Task Force in 2022.

Again, our heartfelt thanks to all of you who made these memorable moments and milestones possible, and our best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season. We look forward to seeing you in 2022!



## **SASTF Staff and Steering Committee**

*(left to right: Liz Boyce, Justin Wood, Rose Luna, Nicole Martinez, Hillary England, LaDonna McCray, and Aimee Snoddy)*

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## **New Task Force Member – Welcome Deepika Modali!**



### **Deepika Modali**

Manager of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Asian Family Support Services of Austin

Deepika Modali is a sexual assault survivor and devoted activist who has dedicated her life to advocating for survivors. Currently, she is the Manager of Domestic and Sexual Violence Services at the Asian Family Support Services of Austin, which provides cultural and language specific direct services and advocacy to survivors of domestic, sexual and trafficking violence in the Asian Pacific Islander and immigrant communities. As a child of Indian immigrants, the importance of culturally grounded and language advocacy resonates with her deeply. She has been part of the social justice field for the past 10 years in Texas, which includes working directly with sexual assault survivors providing hospital accompaniment, crisis intervention, and legal advocacy. She currently is an inaugural member of TAASA's Survivor Advisory Board, created to amplify survivor voices across the state of Texas, including informing and supporting the work of the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force, in which Deepika participates in multiple working groups. She also has served as the coordinator of the Sexual Assault Resource and Response Team of Travis County for two years and is currently the co-chair.

Deepika was a senior in college when she was kidnapped and sexually assaulted by two men. Although she reported, her perpetrators were set free and ultimately never prosecuted. As a woman of color from an immigrant community, navigating trauma was challenging due to the lack of culturally grounded resources and a justice system that is not set up to serve survivors. Deepika is excited to join the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force to continue to fight for all survivors to be prioritized by the criminal justice system. She is passionate about inclusivity, advocating for all survivors, especially those in marginalized communities, to be heard and hopes to bring these important issues to the forefront.

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## SASTF Campus Working Group

We are excited to announce that the Steering Committee has approved membership for a new focused working group comprising survivors, college students, Title IX Coordinators, professors, university police officers, SANEs, prosecutors, and other subject matter experts. This working group will discuss the vulnerabilities and unique needs of sexual assault survivors on college campuses. The Inaugural Campus Working Group Meeting was held on December 9<sup>th</sup>.

The Campus Working Group will:

- Discuss the vulnerabilities and unique needs of the Texas college campus population including, but not limited to, living independently for the first time; increased exposure and access to alcohol and/or drugs; navigating multiple response systems including university administration, Title IX, university law enforcement, local law enforcement, university health system/rape crisis services, and local health system/rape crisis services; and specific safety concerns including possible continued exposure to the perpetrator on campus.
- Gain an understanding of current sexual assault prevention education and campus-based sexual assault awareness activities for Texas' college students, with the goal of making recommendations for improvement.
- Advise and provide resources to improve sexual assault training for faculty, staff, student organizations and college students.
- Identify opportunities where university administrators and campus law enforcement should collaborate with local law enforcement when handling reports and investigations of sexual assault.
- Develop best practices for connecting university administration with community service providers and off-campus resources.

Collaborate with other SASTF working groups as indicated to add expertise on campus-specific issues and concerns.

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## Task Force Member Spotlight: Dr. Amy Castillo

### **Dr. Amy Castillo**

Chief Operating Officer (COO) - Houston Forensic Science Center  
Texas Association of Crime Laboratory Directors



Dr. Amy Castillo, HFSC's COO and vice president, has been working for HFSC since its establishment in 2014. Dr. Castillo worked as a forensic biology criminalist under the HPD Crime Laboratory. She became a supervisor in July 2013 and helped oversee the elimination of Houston's backlog of untested sexual assault kits. She was part of the Houston Sexual Assault Task Force that was formed under an action research project funded by the National Institute of Justice and continues to be part of the current Houston Task Force. Dr. Castillo holds several patents and is an expert in semen and blood identification, differential extraction, amplification of forensic DNA and other scientific methods related to forensic biology. Dr. Castillo completed her doctoral degree in biochemistry at the University of Houston.

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## Implementation Guidance for Recently Passed Legislation

### **Senate Bill 476: Sexual Assault Response Teams (SARTs)**

**SB 476** requires all Texas counties to form an adult Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) in an effort to create a statewide infrastructure of resources, awareness, connection, and coordination to address sex crimes locally. A SART is a formalized coordinated response to a sexual assault that allows multi-disciplinary professionals to coordinate and develop interagency responses to work together to address sexual assault by providing wrap-around support and communication.

The commissioner's court of each county was mandated to appoint the SART members and call the first meeting of the county's adult SART. Counties with a population of 250,000 residents or smaller have the option of partnering with other nearby, small counties to form a regional SART. The commissioner's court must invite all statutory members that provide services within a county to participate.

The Texas Association of Regional Councils (TARC) has published additional resources for SARTs and webinars for counties and Council of Governments (COGs) and can be found on their [website](#).

If you have any questions or need assistance, the Texas Association Against Sexual Assault (TAASA), which is leading the SB 476 implementation Steering Committee, stands ready to help. Send an email to [SART@taasa.org](mailto:SART@taasa.org) with your question and contact information and someone from the organization or the Steering Committee will follow up with you.

[SART Information Sheet](#)

[TAASA's SART Guide](#)

## **House Bill 1172: Sexual Assault Advocate Accompaniment**

**HB 1172** improves the reporting experience for adult survivors by addressing three areas of the initial reporting process:

1. Prohibits law enforcement or prosecutors from requesting or taking a polygraph examination of a survivor
2. Increase accessibility of forensic exams
3. Requires advocate accompaniment during law enforcement interviews

Survivors of sexual assault now have the right to have a sexual assault program advocate or other appropriate representative present during a law enforcement interview, provided the advocate or representative does not delay or otherwise impede the interview process.

**Note:** *The TAASA Sexual Assault Advocate Accompaniment: An Implementation Guide for Law Enforcement provided in the link below is specific to the portion of the bill related to law enforcement's responsibility for offering an advocate during an interview.*

[TAASA Advocate Accompaniment Guide for Law Enforcement](#)

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## Survivor Voices: TAASA Survivor Advisory Board

The TAASA Survivor Advisory Board (SAB) hosted its first meeting in August 2020 with 17 volunteer board members from all over the State. Since then, the board members have provided various presentations, technical assistance to TAASA programs and outside organizations, policy support, survivor leadership to the Sexual Assault Survivors' Task Force, and outreach and engagement to survivors around Texas.

SAB envisions a Texas where all survivors are heard, believed, supported, prioritized, recognized for their unique experiences, and valued as experts in their own healing. SAB's mission is to elevate survivor voices in leading systemic change throughout Texas in all spaces where policies are made and services are provided, from community to legislation, in pursuit of a society where survivors heal and thrive.

For SAB's second year, all projects fall under these three pillars: Outreach and support, speak out, and policy change. In 2022, SAB hopes to host virtual gatherings with survivors across the State, facilitate listening sessions with survivors, just to name a few. To learn more about TAASA's Survivor Advisory Board, please visit their [webpage](#).

SAB steering team members talk about why SAB is important to them:

"When TAASA first rolled out the SAB (Survivor Advisory Board), I immediately knew that this was a table that I was destined to sit at and was more than honored to learn that my reservation had been confirmed. To know that Texas understood the assignment of actually including survivor voices in the processes of changing and or initiating laws that support victims as well as providing expert advice on language, communication, and resources that aid in the healing and overall wellbeing of their mental health was more than an opportunity for me to make a difference in the lives of others. It was also the perfect opportunity for collective survivor voices to make an impact not only in our State but in our justice system. Our collective voices are finally prioritized, we are finally heard, and although we feel that the respect given to us as experts in this field may be long overdue, we humbly accept the assignment to elevate every survivor's voice as we promote self-care, healing, and justice for all victims."

~ Lavinia Masters

"I was drawn to the SAB because it was the first project I've heard of where survivors lead. We aren't a rubber stamp or an afterthought, we co-create together, and our voices are the only ones that matter. Being new to raising my voice as a survivor, it was important to me to find a project that genuinely was survivor-led and survivor-centered. This allowed me to do just that alongside some amazing women.

~ Emily LeBlanc

"When I was approached to be a part of TAASA's survivor advisory board, I knew I had to be a part of this all-star group of survivors. I couldn't pass on the chance to be a part of a group where survivors were in charge at every step of the process. Too frequently, groups will say they are trauma-informed and survivor-centered, but no one has genuinely embodied those words like SAB. Survivors across Texas are still enduring unnecessary trauma. I believe essential changes are just around the corner because of the incredible leaders in our group working tirelessly day in and out to have our voices in every room where decisions are being made. I am honored to be a leader with this group and know that our work will affect lives."

~ Marina Garrett

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## Houston Sexual Assault Kit Data Pilot

The SASTF Data Working Group is pleased to announce the formal kickoff of its Sexual Assault Evidence Kit (SAEK) Data Pilot project, in collaboration with the Houston Police Department, Houston Forensic Science Center and the Department of Public Safety Crime Laboratory (Track-Kit). The pilot will create a process to monitor data related to pending sexual assault evidence kits (SAEKs) at each step of the kit processing continuum including hospitals/medical providers, law enforcement, and crime labs, along with a data dashboard and related reports.

Data from the pilot will be used to create a more complete picture of Texas' pending SAEKs including a platform to explore the root causes of any SAEK processing delays, and will contribute to clear action plans targeting necessary improvements for survivors.

This project is a benchmark effort to facilitate transparency, accountability and collaboration within and between agencies that serve Texas' survivors and encourages agencies to share and learn from each other's challenges and successes. We look forward to sharing updates with you as the pilot project progresses!

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## DPS Updates

### Track-Kit Updates

On September 7<sup>th</sup>, Texas Track-Kit was upgraded to Version 3.1 which includes some enhancements. The request to add an email notification when one law enforcement agency (LEA) initiates a kit transfer to another LEA was included in the enhancements and is now available. The automated email will be sent to the receiving LEA when a kit transfer is initiated to their agency. LEA users now have the ability to subscribe to and receive the notifications.

*Special thanks to Lt. Bill Grayson of the San Antonio Police Department for bringing this issue to the Law Enforcement Working Group for discussion, and to Rebecca Vieh from the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Crime Laboratory for supporting the ongoing development and improvement of Track-Kit!*

Other upgrades and enhancements to Track-Kit include:

- **Medical Facilities/LEAs/Lab:** Camera scanning allows users to scan kit barcodes from their mobile or tablet devices.
- **Medical Facilities/LEAs/Lab/Prosecutors:** To help prevent disabled accounts, an email notification will be sent to users 10 days prior to their account being disabled instructing them to login so their account remains active.
- **Medical Facilities:** Option to select “Out-of-State” or “Federal/Military” for the Storage Location of a Non-Report/Restricted Kit.
- **LEAs:** When a kit has an assigned officer, notifications pertaining to that kit will only be sent to that officer. Previously, all agency users received notifications unless they opted out.
- **LEAs:** When one LEA initiates a kit transfer, the receiving LEA can receive an email notification.
- **Survivors:** Option to choose when they want to receive notifications regarding their kit. They can select to receive notifications as soon as available or select an ideal time (hourly increments).

If you or your agency has any questions or needs assistance subscribing to the notification, please contact Rebecca Vieh at the Texas DPS Crime Laboratory:

**Rebecca Vieh**  
Sexual Assault Evidence Tracking Program  
Texas DPS Crime Laboratory  
Phone: 512-424-7984  
[rebecca.vieh@dps.texas.gov](mailto:rebecca.vieh@dps.texas.gov)

## **Statewide Electronic Tracking System Report**

Texas Government Code 420.034 (h) requires the Department to publish the "Statewide Electronic Tracking System Report" by December 1st of each year. The report will use Track-Kit data to identify the number of kits that have not yet been submitted for laboratory analysis or for which laboratory analysis has not yet been completed. **Track-Kit only tracks evidence kits collected on or after September 1, 2019.**

## **[Statewide Electronic Tracking System Report \(2021\)](#)**

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## Special Thanks and Acknowledgement

The SASTF staff would like to thank all the Task Force Members and focused working group members for their continued work and dedication to ending sexual violence in Texas.

We would also like to extend our gratitude to Honorable Brandon Birmingham, Presiding Judge for the 292<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District (Dallas County), for his service and contribution to the SASTF. Judge Birmingham brought a judicial perspective to this work and recently resigned from the Task Force. We wish you all the best!

We were fortunate to have additional subject matter experts who are not a member of the Task Force or focused working groups help us review and provide recommendations for improvement to current law enforcement trainings related to sexual assault. We would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their assistance with the law enforcement training review:

- Kara Harrington - Human Trafficking Advocate at Texas Association Against Sexual Assault
- Keri Ward – Attorney at Texas Advocacy Project
- Kristi Wheeless – Advocacy Manager at The Bridge Over Troubled Waters
- Luis Acuna-Pilgrim – Program Manager at the Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas
- Mike Smith – Chief of Police at Lubbock Christian University Police Department
- Monica Urbaniak – Trauma Therapist at Urbaniak Wellness
- Todd Gyure – Mental Health Officer at Garland Police Department
- Darlene Lanham – Executive Director at Asian Family Support Services of Austin
- Brad Watson – Survivor, Advocate, and Author
- Sergeant Wesley Rodriguez – Texas Department of Public Safety



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## Funding Opportunities

- **District Attorney Forensic Evidence Testing**  
The purpose of this announcement is to solicit applications from district attorney offices for costs associated with the forensic analysis of physical evidence.
- **Sexual Assault Evidence Testing**  
The purpose of this announcement is to solicit applications from law enforcement agencies for costs associated with the forensic analysis of physical evidence in relation to sexual assault or other sex offenses.
- **Criminal Justice Programs**  
The purpose of this announcement is to solicit applications for projects that promote public safety, reduce crime, and improve the criminal justice system.
- **SAFE-Ready Facilities**  
The purpose of this announcement is to solicit applications from hospital facilities seeking to achieve or maintain a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE)-Ready designation, as well as non-profit corporations seeking to operate or maintain a SAFE Program as defined in Chapter 323 of the Texas Health and Safety Code.
- **Violence Against Women Criminal Justice and Training Projects**  
The purpose of this announcement is to solicit applications for projects that promote a coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach to improve the justice system's response to violent crimes against women, including domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.
- **General Victim Assistance Program**  
The purpose of this program is to provide services and assistance directly to victims of crime to speed their recovery and aid them through the criminal justice process.

Services may include the following:

- Responding to the emotional and physical needs of crime victims;
- Assisting victims in stabilizing their lives after a victimization;
- Assisting victims to understand and participate in the criminal justice system;
- and - Providing victims with safety and security.

***Other funding opportunities of interest can be found [here](#).***

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## Learning Opportunities

### **End Violence Against Women International (EVAWI) Annual Conference**

International Conference on Sexual Assault, Domestic Violence, and Reimagining Justice

Hilton San Francisco Union Square – San Francisco, California

April 19 - 21, 2022

[EVAWI Conference Website](#)

[EVAWI Conference Brochure](#)

[2022 EVAWI Conference Scholarship](#)

*(Only available for sworn LE personnel and active prosecutors)*

### **17<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Crimes Against Women**

Sheraton Hotel – Dallas, Texas

May 23 - 26, 2022

[CCAW Conference Website](#)