

## **Complainant Notification and Information Line Protocols**

SAK Action-Research Task Force  
Houston, Texas

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### **Note Regarding the Task Force:**

Houston’s Sexual Assault Kit Action-Research Task Force was established in 2011 through a grant awarded by the National Institute of Justice. The goal of the project was to determine best practices in resolving the issue of untested sexual assault kits (SAKs), specifically for the City of Houston, but also with the hope of providing recommendations that can be extrapolated to other cities and law enforcement jurisdictions. The Task Force has been a collaborative effort bringing together the Houston Police Department (Crime Laboratory, Property Division, Adult Sex Crimes Unit, and Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit), Harris County District Attorney’s Office, Houston Area Women’s Center, Harris Health System, Memorial Hermann Health System, The University of Texas at Austin, and Sam Houston State University. In 2013, Mayor Annise Parker, through the City of Houston, awarded the Houston Police Department funds to test all previously untested sexual assault kits. The protocols in this document were developed through a working group in collaboration with the SAK Task Force.

## Complainant Notification Protocol<sup>1</sup>

**Purpose:** These protocols, created as an output of the Sexual Assault Kit Action-Research Task Force, establish the groundwork for how each cold case will proceed after analysis of the sexual assault kit (SAK) is complete, including investigative and victim notification procedures.

**CODIS Squad:** The CODIS Squad was created in 2013 in preparation for the outsourced SAKs to be analyzed and returned to the Houston Police Department. Historically, the Adult and Juvenile Sex Crimes Units have been housed in different divisions: Special Crimes Division and Juvenile Division, respectively. Since this was a large-scale project encompassing both the Adult and Juvenile Sex Crimes Units, with the two Units working together intimately within the Task Force, they were essentially combined under Special Crimes Division. For the rest of the protocols the term “Sex Crimes Unit” (SCU) will refer to both the Adult and Juvenile Sex Crimes Units collectively. The CODIS Squad includes the following:

- Lieutenants (from Adult and Juvenile Sex Crimes Units)
- Sergeants (from Adult and Juvenile Sex Crimes Units and Family Violence Unit)
- CODIS Squad Investigators: Assigned CODIS-hit cases only
  - o Juvenile CODIS Squad investigators are assigned juvenile CODIS-hit cases.
  - o Adult CODIS Squad investigators are assigned adult CODIS-hit cases.
- Investigators: Assigned all other cases (all non-CODIS-hit cases) for review
- Justice Advocate: Full-time position housed within the Adult SCU, available to work with adult complainants in current cases and adult and juvenile complainants in cold cases.<sup>2</sup>
- Temporary Employees<sup>3</sup>: In this context, a Temporary Employee refers to an honorably retired HPD police officer, who has been interviewed and undergone a background check to be hired as a civilian employee. These employees will be assigned DNA negative and CODIS ineligible cases to review and supplement.

### **Possible results from analysis of sexual assault kits (SAKs) and type of victim contact:**

- Suspect CODIS hit<sup>4</sup> – Complainant should be contacted
  - o **Exception:** In cases where the statutes of limitations has expired and there is no prosecutorial standing with the case (i.e., the suspect is in prison and this case could impact parole, or if the case is connected to other cases making the suspect a serial offender) the Complainant *will not* be contacted.
- Case-to-case CODIS hit without identified suspect – No contact, unless complainant contacts the Information Line or unless a suspect is identified in one of the case hits
- DNA positive, CODIS eligible – No contact, unless complainant contacts the Information Line or CODIS hit is made

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<sup>1</sup> Note on the vocabulary chosen for this document: The decision was made to refer to the victims/survivors of sexual assault as “complainants” in these protocols. This was determined as the primary purpose of this document is Houston Police Department policy, and the term “complainant” is commonly used within law enforcement. This is not to denigrate the survivor or his/her experience. For any documents that will be disseminated from these protocols, the choice in vocabulary will be “survivor.”

<sup>2</sup> A job description of the Justice Advocate position can be found in Appendix 1.

<sup>3</sup> At this time Temporary Employees have been requested for this project, but the budget has not been approved to staff these positions. The protocols explain how these employees will be utilized if approved.

<sup>4</sup> This category includes single cases that result in a CODIS hit to a suspect, as well as serial cases that CODIS matches as case-to-case hits with an identified suspect.

- DNA positive, CODIS ineligible – No contact, unless complainant contacts the Information Line
- DNA negative – No contact, unless complainant contacts the Information Line

### **How should complainants be notified?**

- **Protocol for CODIS-hit cases (identified suspect).**
  - CODIS Squad investigator is assigned case that has received a CODIS hit.
  - The first step in locating the complainant is for the investigator to check to if the complainant has contacted the Information Line.
  - If the complainant has not contacted the Information Line, the investigator performs research to locate the complainant using usual location strategies.
  - Investigator makes initial contact with the complainant to communicate new case information has been discovered. As the initial contact comes without warning, often many years later, these conversations must be sensitive to the complainant's needs and emotional responses. The ideal form of initial communication is telephone, but the priority in the type of communication is as follows:
    - Investigator initiates the phone conversation by introducing him/herself, alerting that new information has been discovered, and allows for response from the complainant. Investigator asks to set a time to meet in-person to provide specific information. Investigator asks if the complainant would like for the advocate to accompany. An appointment is scheduled that works for the complainant, investigator, and advocate (if attending).
    - If telephone communication with the complainant is not possible, then searching for contact information of a person close to the complainant is the next best option. Preferably, someone mentioned in the original case, so it is known that the individual knew about the sexual assault. When speaking with the secondary person, the investigator should attempt to collect the complainant's updated contact information without providing information on the complainant's case.
    - The complainant may be able to be located on Facebook or other social media sites as a way to find location or additional information.
    - If the above options are not possible, but the complainant has a known address that is local, then the investigator and advocate should make an in-person visit to the complainant's residence.
    - If the complainant is known to live outside of the Houston area and has been unable to be contacted by phone, coordinating with a law enforcement jurisdiction in the complainant's area to make contact is an option. Similar to contacting a secondary person, the officer from a different jurisdiction should not provide the new case-related information, but rather request that the complainant contact the investigator.
    - The last resort of contact, when a complainant is unable to be reached through other means, is to send a certified letter to their residence. This letter will include limited personal information and will not state the new case information; it will ask the complainant to call the investigator.<sup>5</sup>
  - Investigator meets the complainant in-person. Investigator presents the new information that has been learned about the case through SAK analysis allowing

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<sup>5</sup> Template for a contact letter can be found in Appendix 2.

space for the complainant to have an emotional response. The investigator should come to this meeting prepared to present the full facts of the case: the new lab information in the case and its meaning, information from the DA's office (if known), and the possibilities of where this case could go (including information on the statute of limitations). Investigators should also be prepared to discuss issues related to the backlog, as the complainants may have questions. Investigator asks the complainant if they desire to continue the investigation and participate in the process – this should not be emphasized as something that must be decided in the moment. It should be considered and if they need to talk with someone else (family member, friend, religious leader, or therapist) they should be able to do so.

- If the advocate accompanies the visit, then the advocate will discuss emotions, re-traumatization, and will provide resources to the complainant.
- If the advocate does not accompany, the investigator will provide the advocate's business card and let the complainant know the advocate will call them in a few days. This will be offered to all complainants regardless of whether or not they desire to continue with the investigation or not.
- If the meeting takes place in the Adult SCU (Central Unit), the advocate will talk with the complainant in person. Arrangements can be made for the advocate to meet with complainants at the Juvenile SCU (Southeast Unit).
- All complainants should be provided with the SCU's Resource list, which includes the complainant's case number, investigator's and advocate's name and number, statutes of limitations date, and community resources.
- The investigator or advocate will make routinely follow-up with the complainant once the case has re-opened. If the complainant decides to no longer participate in the investigation, the advocate can follow up with the complainant one more time.

- **Protocol for Case-to-Case CODIS hit, but no suspect hit.**

- A CODIS Squad investigator reviews the case in its entirety to determine if there are any leads that were not followed or any issues that were not addressed.
- If the case was appropriately investigated with no apparent leads to follow, the investigator (or a CODIS Squad Temporary Employee) will add a supplement to the report regarding new lab information.
- If the investigator recognizes a lead that was never followed up on, then the case will be referred to a supervisor and discussed on a case-by-case basis.
- If the complainant contacts the Information Line, an appointment will be made for an investigator to speak with the complainant in-person.
- If the complainant has new information or an identified suspect presents, the investigator will follow the steps found in "Protocol for CODIS-hit cases."

- **Protocol for DNA positive, CODIS eligible.**

- A CODIS Squad Temporary Employee or CODIS Squad Officer will review the case in its entirety to see if there are any issues that were not addressed.
- If the case was appropriately investigated with no additional leads, the Temporary Employee will add a supplement to the report.
- If the Temporary Employee feels there are leads that can be investigated further, it should be directed to the supervisor in order to decide whether it should be assigned to an investigator or not. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

- If the complainant contacts the Information Line, an appointment will be made for an investigator to speak with the complainant in-person.
- **Protocol for DNA positive, CODIS ineligible.**
  - A CODIS Squad Temporary Employee will review the case in its entirety to see if there are any leads that were not followed or any issues that were not addressed.
  - If the case was appropriately investigated and no issues appear, the Temporary Employee will add a supplement to the report.
  - If the Temporary Employee feels there are leads that can be investigated further, it should be directed to the supervisor in order to decide whether it should be assigned to an investigator or not. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
  - If the complainant contacts the Information Line, an appointment will be made for an investigator to speak with the complainant in-person.
- **Protocol for DNA negative cases.**
  - A CODIS Squad Temporary Employee will review the case in its entirety to see if there are any leads that were not followed or any issues that were not addressed.
  - If the case was appropriately investigated and no issues appear, the Temporary Employee will add a supplement to the report.
  - If the Temporary Employee feels there are leads that can be investigated further, it should be directed to the supervisor in order to decide whether it should be assigned to an investigator or not. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis.
  - If the complainant contacts the Information Line, an appointment will be made for an investigator to speak with the complainant in-person.

### **Considerations and Logistics for Complainant Notification**

- Considerations for initial phone call between investigator and complainant.
  - Estimate about thirty (30) minutes to an hour phone conversation.
  - Acknowledge up front the time delay regarding untested kits. If/when appropriate discuss the issues of the delay and the process that is taking place to solve the issue.
- Considerations for first in-person meeting between investigator and complainant.
  - Make sure to be prepared to have all case-related information (new and old). This includes information about the statutes of limitations, any input from the district attorney's office (if applicable), etc. Share as appropriate on a case-by-case basis.
  - Location of the first meeting.
    - There is a chance the complainant may not feel comfortable or may not be able to meet the investigator at the police department due to a multitude of barriers (i.e., distrust of police, transportation issues, childcare needs, etc.). These complications should be met with understanding.
    - Location options for meeting in-person:
      - HPD Central Unit (Adult Sex Crimes Unit) / HPD Southeast Unit (Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit).
      - Meeting room at Houston Area Women's Center (1010 Waugh Drive, Houston 77019). Coordinating for investigators to utilize a room at HAWC to meet with complainants. When needed HAWC may be able to help complainants with transportation and childcare.

- Meeting at a police substation/storefront near the complainant's residence, only if they are able to provide a private room for the investigator to meet with the complainant.
- Meeting at the complainant's residence.

## Sexual Assault Information Line & Email Protocol

**Purpose:** The Information Line and Email were created for adult and juvenile complainants of sex crimes, who reported to the Houston Police Department and completed a sexual assault examination from the 1980s to the present, specifically, for complainants whose SAKs went untested. The Information Line and Email serve as a conduit for these complainants to contact HPD to seek information regarding their case and to provide updated contact information.

### Definitions:

- Sexual Assault Information Line: This is a phone line for complainants of sexual assault, who reported to the Houston Police Department and completed a sexual assault examination, to contact HPD in order to request information regarding their previously reported case. The goal of the Information Line is to address the issue of the delay in testing sexual assault kits. The issue will be addressed in a victim-centered manner, by providing complainants the opportunity to choose to contact HPD first in order to learn more about their case. For the purpose of these protocols, it will be referred to as the “Information Line” or the “phone line.”
- Sexual Assault Email Address: This is an email address for complainants of sexual assault, who reported to the Houston Police Department and completed a sexual assault examination, to contact HPD in order to request information regarding their previously reported case. The goal of the email address is to address the issue of the sexual assault kit backlog in a victim-centered way, by providing complainants the opportunity to choose to contact HPD first in order to learn more about their case. For the purpose of these protocols, it will be referred to as the Email Address or the Email option.
- Complainant: This term refers to the person who survived the sexual assault. This includes both adult (17 years and older) and juvenile (under 17 years old) survivors.
- Respondent/Responder: These terms are used interchangeably and refer to the trained individuals who respond to the Information Line and Email based at HPD headquarters.
- Sexual Assault Kit (SAK): The SAK is also known as a Sexual Assault Forensic Examination (SAFE), Forensic Exam, or a Rape Kit. The term used in these policies is sexual assault kit (or SAK) for the purpose of consistency. This refers to an examination completed in a hospital by a sexual assault nurse examiner (SANE), a registered nurse, or physician that attempts to collect evidence from the victim’s body after a sexual assault, provides treatment for any injuries and medication to prevent pregnancy and the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

### Logistics of the Sexual Assault Information Line:

- Hours of Operation:
  - o The Information Line will have a trained responder from 8<sup>AM</sup> to 4<sup>PM</sup> Monday through Friday (with the exception of city holidays). During the evening hours and on the weekends, a voicemail system will activate allowing for callers to hear an explanatory and welcoming message. This will provide the opportunity for callers to leave a message, which will be followed up with a phone call from a Responder as soon as possible, usually the next business day when the message is received.
- Who will respond to the Information Line?
  - o The Information Line will be staffed by the Sex Crimes Unit’s Justice Advocate as the Information Line Manager. It will also be staffed by a rotation of the Justice Advocate, HPD Family Violence Unit Crisis Counselors, and Temporary Employees.

At any given time during the hours of 8<sup>AM</sup> to 4<sup>PM</sup> Monday through Friday, there should be at least two staff members responding to Information Line callers. The number of respondents can be adjusted based on how busy the Information Line demonstrates to be.

- A rotation of the responders will be created based on their availability. Each of the respondents may be asked to staff the Information Line one day a week. If having a full day shift is not feasible, then splitting a day's shift into two half shifts covered by two people is acceptable.
- During the shift the respondent is responsible for listening to voicemails left over night or over the weekend. They are responsible for documenting the voicemails. During a lull in phone calls the respondent is responsible for working on returning voicemail messages.
- Information Line Response Language:
  - The language and tone used by the respondent when answering the call is important. It needs to be non-threatening and welcoming.
  - The Information Line should be answered with the following greeting: "Houston Police Department Sexual Assault Information Line, this is [name of respondent]..."
- Voicemail Message:
  - As the Information Line will be staffed from Monday through Friday 8<sup>AM</sup> to 4<sup>PM</sup>, there is a large amount of time when a caller will receive the voicemail message upon calling. Recognizing the sensitivity of the issue, we want to ensure the voicemail message is trauma-informed. The message must include these characteristics:
    - The *first thing* the voicemail menu should provide is the option to hear the message in Spanish.
    - Informative content:
      - Who they have reached (the HPD Sexual Assault Information Line)
      - When the Line is being staffed
      - The option to leave a message and their message will be returned as soon as possible
      - The option to email as well
    - Be spoken slowly and calmly in a welcoming voice and empathic tone
    - Provide the 24-hour crisis hotline number to the Houston Area Women's Center hotline
  - Sample Voicemail Message:

"Hello, you have reached Houston Police Department's Sexual Assault Information Line. Para Español oprima sero. If you are recently a victim of sexual assault and need emergency assistance, please hang up and dial 911. If you are currently working with an assigned investigator, please dial (713)308-1180. To learn more about the status of your previously reported sexual assault, the Line is staffed Monday through Friday from 8<sup>AM</sup> to 4<sup>PM</sup>. If you would like to be contacted about your sexual assault case, please speak slowly and leave a message with your name (spell it aloud), a good contact phone number (stated twice), and your case number if known. You can also email an advocate at SAinfo@houstonpolice.org. If you would like to speak with a sexual assault advocate hang up and dial the Houston Area Women's Center hotline at (713) 528-7273. Thank you again for calling into the Information Line, your call will be returned."

- Issues/Considerations:
  - Language. We have English and Spanish speaking responders who will answer the Information Line. However, we will need access to the Language Line for all other languages.
  - Responder Training. All Information Line responders will be trained on sexual assault and crisis intervention through Houston Area Women’s Center. They will also be trained on what information should be provided and collected over the Information Line, and what community resources can be provided to callers.
  - When a new number is created and publicized, people will be calling for reasons other than learning about their sexual assault kit.<sup>6</sup>
- Needs for the Information Line: The line needs to have access to a few special phone features, including:
  - Caller ID in order to identify repeat callers that are utilizing the line inappropriately, also to identify callers who call in using a blocked or restricted number which may identify inappropriate callers (using a blocked number may also mean the caller is seeking to remain confidential).
  - Ability to block numbers, when a caller is frequently using the line inappropriately.
  - Ability to transfer phone calls.
  - Ability to place callers on hold.
  - Voicemail accessibility and the ability to provide a second language options on the voicemail.

**Logistics of the Sexual Assault Email Address:**

*The Sexual Assault Email Address will function almost identically to the Sexual Assault Information Line. Just like the Information Line, the Email Address will be publicized as an option for the complaint to seek information on previously untested SAKs.*

- Email Address:
  - The email address to be created for this purpose is SAinfo@houstonpolice.org. This option was decided because it is easy to remember and easy to spell.
- Hours of Operation:
  - The email option will function 24 hours a day, but it will be staffed by the Information Line responders from 8<sub>AM</sub> to 4<sub>PM</sub> Monday through Friday (with the exception of city holidays).
- Who will staff the Email Address?
  - The Email Address will be staffed by the same trained individuals who respond to the Information Line. When a respondent is “on shift” to respond to the Information Line, they will also regularly check, document, and reply to emails.
- Email Response Time:
  - It is imperative to respond as quickly and efficiently to the emails being received as possible. An automatic response will be created, so once an individual emails the Sexual Assault Email they will receive an immediate response acknowledging the receipt. Here is an option of what this automatic response will include:

Hello, thank you for contacting the Houston Police Department’s Sexual Assault Information Email. We have received your email, and will respond to you within the next 72 business hours. You can also call our Information Line at (713)308-1400 if you

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<sup>6</sup> Policies for inappropriate callers to the Sexual Assault Information Line can be found on Appendix 3.

wish to speak to someone. The Information Line is staffed Monday through Friday 8<sup>AM</sup> to 4<sup>PM</sup>, but you will be able to leave a message on evenings and weekends.

If you would like to speak with a sexual assault advocate, please call the Houston Area Women's Center 24-hour hotline at (713)528-7273.

Thank you again for contacting the Information Email Address.

- After the automatic response each email should be responded to uniquely by a respondent within 72 business hours (or three business days). All emails should be responded to via email, until it is deemed necessary to speak over the phone or in-person.
- Email Response Language:
  - The language used by the respondent when answering the email is important. It needs to be non-threatening and welcoming.
  - The end of each email should include a signature with the name of the respondent who is replying to the email, the email address for the Sexual Assault Email, and the Sexual Assault Information Line number. For example:

Sincerely,

[Name of Respondent]  
Information Line | (713)308-1400  
Email | SAinfo@houstonpolice.org

- Issues/Considerations:
  - Language. With access to responders who are able to read and write in English and Spanish, we will potentially need access to a service that is able to translate other languages.
  - All Information Line responders will be trained on sexual assault and crisis intervention by Houston Area Women's Center. They will also be trained on what information should be provided and collected over the Information Line, and what community resources can be provided to callers.

### **Information to be Provided and Collected on the Information Line and Email.**

*The protocol for information collected or provided is the same whether the complainant is utilizing phone or email to communicate.*

- Information provided to the complainant:
  - No new information from sexual assault kit analysis will be provided over the Information Line or Email, with one exception. It should be explained that this information is kept confidential, so we will need to verify the complainant's identity in person before letting them know any case-specific information.
    - The only exception of SAK information provided to the complainant over the phone or email is when the SAK is currently outsourced to be analyzed. The respondent will still gather all of the complainant's updated contact information and then explain that their sexual assault kit is currently outsourced to be analyzed. The respondent should also request the complainant call or email back about once a month to check the status of the case, as all of the sexual assault kits will not be returned until late spring or summer 2014.

- It should be explained that at this time there may not be new information on the complainant's case yet. There have been 6,663 sexual assault kits that have been sent out, all of them are being tested and have started to come back to Houston.
- Respondents should request the complainant provide updated contact information, so an investigator with Houston Police Department Sex Crimes Unit can return the call as soon as possible and schedule an in-person appointment to provide further information.
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Provide any community resources if needed (specifically related to re-traumatization).
- Information that should be collected from the complainant<sup>7</sup>:
  - Complainant's information:
    - Name of the complainant (current legal name and name used at the time of the incident, in case complainant has divorced or married since the incident)
    - Date of birth
    - Phone number(s). Can a message be left? Best time to be reached?
    - Current address (physical and mailing, if different)
    - Email address
    - Contact information for another person if we cannot get in touch with the complainant. Name, relationship, phone number
    - Preferred form of contact
  - Caller's information, if different from the complainant (i.e., complainant's parent)
  - Information about the sexual assault (whatever information is able to be provided):
    - Year of the sexual assault
    - Age at assault
    - Did complainant receive a sexual assault examination at a hospital? Yes/No/Unsure. If yes, which hospital?
    - Did you file a report with HPD (not the sheriff's office or local police jurisdiction)? Yes/No/Unsure.
    - Case number
  - How did you learn about the Information Line?
  - Were referrals provided over the Information Line? If so, which ones?
- Juvenile Issues:
  - If a parent/guardian of a juvenile complainant contacts the Information Line to find out an update on their child's case it must be determined (1.) How old the complainant was at the time of the sexual assault and (2.) How old the complainant is presently.
    - If the complainant is under 17 years of age currently, the parent/guardian has the right to receive the information. In this case the complainant should be included in this process as much as willing or able.
    - If the complainant is currently 17 years of age or older, but currently living with the parent/guardian and/or attending secondary school, then the parent/guardian has the right to receive the information. In this case the complainant should be included in this process as much as willing or able.

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<sup>7</sup> Forms that have been developed to document information collected over the Information Line (over the phone or via voicemail) and Email can be found in Appendix 4.

- If the complainant is currently 17 years of age or older, but the complainant is disabled causing the parent/guardian to have legal guardianship, then the parent/guardian has the right to receive the information. In this case the complainant should be included in this process as much as willing or able.
  - Other than the situations stated above, if the complainant is currently 17 years of age or older, no information will be provided to the parent/guardian as the complainant is considered a legal adult. This will be explained to the parent/guardian and stated that in order to receive more information on the case the complainant will have to seek information.
- Deceased Complainants:
  - If the complainant has since deceased, but a family member (parent/guardian, spouse/partner, sibling) contacts the Line seeking information it will need to be decided on a case-by-case basis as to whether information will be able to be provided or not. While it will need to be decided by the investigator and advocate if information is allowed to be provided, certain qualifications may be required:
    - The surviving family member will be asked to meet in person.
    - The surviving family member seeking information may be asked to provide a certificate of death.
  - The same policy for notification will be followed whether the contact person is the complainant, the complainant's parent/guardian, or a surviving family member of the complainant.

#### **Documentation of Complainant Information:**

- Two different databases will be utilized in conjunction with the use of the Information Line. The two databases function separately and distinctly.
  - Investigative Project Database. This database contains information on all (juvenile and adult) SAKs that have been outsourced for analysis. This in-house HPD database is a live database (updated in real time) that will allow the person accessing it to see if a specific SAK is back in HPD custody or if it is currently outsourced.
    - This database will be able to be viewed by the Information Line responders. Responders will not need to edit the information, nor will they have access to do so.
    - Currently, the database contains the following information: HPD case number and status of the SAK (i.e., outsourced, CODIS in/eligible, etc.). It does not contain the results of the SAK (i.e., CODIS hit) or the complainant's name.
  - Information Line and Voicemail/Email Database. This database will contain documentation of all (juvenile and adult) complainants who call into the Information Line, leave a voicemail message, or send an email. This will also be an in-house HPD database that is live (updated in real time).
    - This database will be accessible (with editing ability) to all of the Information Line responders. This also accessible (with editing ability) to all CODIS Squad sergeants, investigators, and Temporary Employees that are working the previously untested SAK cases from the Sex Crimes Units. Responders will be responsible for inputting information from each complainant contact in the database. Information will be entered into the database during or immediately after contact with the complainant.
    - The documentation in this database can be found under Appendix 4.

## How to Get the Word Out

With the creation of the Information Line for complainants to contact HPD, it will be important to communicate this new information to the public.

### Types of Communication

- Video: Professionally made Public Service Announcement
- Press conference with local news media
- Flyers: Pamphlet
- Word of Mouth: Share information with clinical directors, announce at coalition/group meetings

### Channels of Communication

- Internet-based
  - o HPD website and Facebook
  - o City of Houston website, Facebook, weekly email
  - o Mayor's office website
  - o City Council member's website
  - o Sexual violence agencies in the metro Houston area
  - o TAASA website
  - o RAINN
  - o Joyful Heart Foundation and End the Backlog website/blog (Mariska Hargitay's Foundation website)
- News Media (press release, television, Internet, radio, hardcopy)
  - o Local news station (KHOU, KTRK, KPRC)
  - o NPR (KUHF local affiliate)
  - o Houston Chronicle
  - o Culture Map
  - o Houstonia
- Brick and Mortar Locations (brochures)
  - o Libraries
  - o Hospitals
  - o OB/GYN offices
  - o United Way Interagency Meeting (SCU's Justice Advocate can announce at meeting)
  - o Sexual violence/domestic violence agencies in metro Houston
  - o Therapy offices (both public and private) that offer trauma-focused care
  - o Substance Treatment
  - o College and University campuses
- Must ensure that the HEC/311, Sex Crimes Unit clerk/desk officer, Homicide Hold Desk has the Information Line number

A Public Information Officer through the Houston Police Department joined the SAK Task Force in the fall of 2013. The purpose of this addition was for the assigned PIO to facilitate media broadcast of project information.

## **Appendix 1. Justice Advocate Position Description**

### ***Objectives to determine the viability and effectiveness of having a Justice Advocate:***

- I. Reduce the attrition rate of complainant participation in the investigative process, in order to increase the rate of case presentation to the Harris County District Attorney's Office with the hope of increased prosecution.
- II. Address the emotional, social, physical needs of complainants throughout the investigative process, especially focusing on complainants of identified concern.

### ***Duties of the Justice Advocate, as it pertains to the above stated objectives:***

- I. Identify complainants of sexual assault that may fall into an "identified concern"\* category.
- II. Establish contact with complainants after investigators' initial contact in order to assess for additional needs. Engage complainant in-person, when appropriately able. Conduct follow-up contact with the complainant monthly, or as appropriate.
- III. Assist complainants with counseling services, referral information, and emotional support.
- IV. Act as a liaison between the police department and community-based advocacy groups, shelters, etc.
- V. Develop and maintain positive associations and interactions with referral and service organizations that may provide support services to complainants.
- VI. Maintain accurate documentation of contact with complainants, including: date, type, and content of communication; reason for contact; case status; and complainant activity level with investigation.
- VII. Evaluate the outcomes of complainants who remain participative throughout the investigative process versus complainants who at some point disengage from the investigative process.

### **\*Complainants that are considered to be of "identified concern" include, but are not limited to:**

- Age: If the complainant is an older adult (65+) or a late adolescent/young adult (17/18/19yo)
- Mental or physical ability: If the complainant experiences any mental or physical disability that may interfere with communication, mobility, cognitive functioning, stability, or emotional well-being
- If the complainant is experiencing homelessness or housing instability
- If the complainant is a male or transgender person
- If the suspect is a member of the complainant's family or closely known.
- If the complainant has additional needs or services that may need to be addressed
- If the complainant is experiencing an increased risk of safety due suspect and/or sexual assault
- If the case is picked up by the media

"Identified concern" cases are not the only times it is important to access the Justice Advocate; these are simply cases where it would be important to do so. Please do not hesitate to bring any case to the Advocate.

**Appendix 2.**

**Template Letter for Contacting Complainants in CODIS Hit Case<sup>8</sup>**



# CITY OF HOUSTON

## Houston Police Department

Annise D. Parker, Mayor

1200 Travis Houston, Texas 77002-6000 713/308-1600

CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS: Helena Brown Jerry Davis Ellen R. Cohen Wanda Adams Dave Martin Al Hoang Oliver Pennington Edward Gonzalez  
James G. Rodriguez Mike Laster Larry V. Green Stephen C. Costello Andrew C. Burks, Jr. Melissa Noriega C. O. "Brad" Bradford Jack Christie  
CITY CONTROLLER: Ronald C. Green

August 19, 2013

**Charles A. McClelland, Jr.**  
Chief of Police



A.B. Smith  
1200 Travis  
Houston, Texas 77002

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am Officer H.A. Cleary of the Houston Police Department, Special Crimes Division. I was assigned an incident report from 2000 in which you were listed as a victim of a crime (HPD# 123456700-A).

A recent review of evidence has led to the possible identification of the person that committed the crime against you. Please contact me at your earliest convenience to discuss the investigation.

I can be reached between the hours of 8:00am to 4:00 pm, Monday – Friday at (713)308-1234, and my email is [hester.cleary@houstonpolice.org](mailto:hester.cleary@houstonpolice.org). If I miss your call, please leave a message with your name, the case number, and the best number(s) where you can be reached.

The Houston Area Women's Center offers a confidential, 24-hour hotline at (713)528-7273 for you to speak with someone, if needed. These services are separate from HPD and are kept completely confidential, regardless of your contact with me.

Sincerely,

Hester Cleary, Investigator  
Houston Police Department  
Special Crimes Division

<sup>8</sup> This template letter is utilized only as a last resort to contact complainants if other means prove not to be successful. It will be printed on HPD letterhead and sent via certified mail.

### **Appendix 3.**

#### **Protocol for Inappropriate Information Line Callers**

When a number is created and publicized throughout the community, it will likely be called by people who are not utilizing the line appropriately for a variety of reasons. It will be up to the Information Line responder's discretion to determine the appropriateness of the caller. These determinations will be reviewed with the Information Line Manager. Responders will receive general support and guidance from the Information Line Manager, in addition to support when calls of an inappropriate nature cause distress to the responder.

#### **Type of calls that are not appropriate for this Information Line:**

- Victims who do not fit into the scope of the SAK Task Force project.
  - o Victim of an unreported sexual assault. If a victim has not reported a sexual assault, but now wants to make a report they should be referred to: their local police department, 911, JUV/SCU office, or a hospital to receive a sexual assault examination if it occurred within the past 72-96 hours. This may require some crisis intervention on the part of the respondent and a referral to a community-based sexual assault agency.
  - o Victims who reported to HPD, but did not receive a sexual assault examination. This should first be verified by the Information Line respondent that they are not in the Crime Lab database. They should be directed to Adult or Juvenile Sex Crimes Units if they have further questions regarding their case.
  - o Victims who did not report to HPD or do not remember to which jurisdiction they reported. If the victim does not remember which jurisdiction they reported to, the respondent should gather all information from the victim to search HPD case report system. They should also ask the location of the incident if remembered. If the victim is unable to be found, then their information should be gathered to be looked into more thoroughly and answered with a return call. Additionally, numbers can be provided for the correct office (Juvenile / Adult Sex Crimes) for the local jurisdictions.
- Victims of crime that has been reported, but not sexual assault related. If the victim knows their case number, then the respondent can look up the investigator assigned in order to provide the number and transfer appropriately.
- Someone reporting an emergency and attempting to reach police. This caller should be told this is not police dispatch, and told they are going to be transferred to 911.
- Callers who are experiencing delusions, hallucinations, or mental health crisis. The Information Line responder should not immediately assume the caller is in mental health crisis or that someone experiencing a mental health crisis on the phone is an inappropriate caller. The responder should ask questions to see if the caller is calling about a sexual assault from the past. If the caller seems to not be utilizing the line to provide contact information in order to learn more about their SAK, they should be forwarded. If they are in mental health crisis they should be forwarded to the appropriate number, either 911 or MHMRA 24-hour HelpLine (713)970-7000. This should be done with great caution. It would be appropriate to at least receive the caller's name, date of birth, and good telephone number to see if the person was a victim of a sexual assault.
- The venting caller. If an individual calls "just to talk" or "vent" they should be told this is not an appropriate number to call and be directed to the crisis line (713)468-5463. Similar to

callers experiencing a mental health crisis, the respondent should ensure that these “venting” callers are not attempting to learn more about their sexual assault case.

- Verbally abusive caller. If a caller is verbally abusive to the respondent it is important to listen to what the caller is saying. Attempt to calm the caller (allowing for the caller to speak, deep breathing, and soothing voice). Do not fight back or engage in swearing or verbal abuse towards the caller. Remember there are some victims of sexual assault that feel abused by the system. If the situation does not seem to be diffusing and/or it does not seem that the caller wants to provide information. Calmly state that you are unable to talk with the caller while s/he is in this state. You can ask the caller to call back when they are able to speak calmly.
- Obscene phone calls. If an individual calls the hotline seeking to pleasure him/herself sexually by engaging in phone conversation with the hotline respondent, the respondent should state firmly “this is not an appropriate use of this line” and terminate the call. Again the respondent should be certain this is taking place before ending the phone call.
- Convicted and/or Named Suspects Seeking Exoneration. Suspects or family/friends related to a suspect may attempt to call this line with the hopes that the SAK in the case the suspect is named will come back to show their innocence. This is an inappropriate use of the hotline, as the Information Line is established for victims of sexual assault. The respondent should state the purpose of the line and encourage the caller to call the Adult or Juvenile Sex Crimes Unit about an update on the case they were named a suspect.

**Appendix 4.  
Information Line Documentation Forms**

| Victim Information                     |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
|--|--|--|---------------------|--|---------------|------------------|----------------|---------------|--|
| ID: (Automatic)                        |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| **Call Date:                           |  |  |                     |  |               | **Call Taker:    |                | PAYROLL #     |  |
| **Caller Name:                         |  |  |                     |  |               | **Call Time:     |                |               |  |
| Victim Information                     |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| **Name of Victim:                      |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Other Names (maiden, married, etc):    |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Relationship to Victim:                |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| <u>Victim/Self</u>                     |  |  | <u>Parent</u>       |  | <u>Spouse</u> |                  |                | <u>Friend</u> |  |
| <u>Sibling</u>                         |  |  | <u>Other Family</u> |  |               | <u>Other</u>     |                |               |  |
| Victim DOB:                            |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| **Victim Phone 1:                      |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Voicemail at Phone 1?:                 |  |  |                     |  |               | <u>Yes / No</u>  |                |               |  |
| Victim Phone 2:                        |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Voicemail at Phone 2?:                 |  |  |                     |  |               | <u>Yes / No</u>  |                |               |  |
| **Home Address:                        |  |  |                     |  |               | Mailing Address: |                |               |  |
|  |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
|  |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Alternative Contact Person Information |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Can we contact someone else?:          |  |  |                     |  |               | <u>Yes / No</u>  |                |               |  |
| Alt. contact person:                   |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Alt. contact phone:                    |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Alt. contact email:                    |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Relationship to victim?:               |  |  | <u>Parent</u>       |  | <u>Spouse</u> |                  |                |               |  |
| <u>Friend</u>                          |  |  | <u>Other Family</u> |  | <u>Other</u>  |                  | <u>Sibling</u> |               |  |
| Preferred Language:                    |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
| Notes:                                 |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |
|  |  |  |                     |  |               |                  |                |               |  |

## SA Kit Information

ID: (Automatic)

### SA Information

**Year Sexual Assault Occurred:**

**Victim Age at Offense:**

**Reported to HPD:** Yes / No / Unknown

**If not HPD, what agency:**

**Victim visit hospital?** Yes / No

**What hospital?**

**Know case number?** Yes / No

**Case number**

**How heard about Info Line:** TV Radio Internet Flyer Other Ad

Word of Mouth Newspaper Support Agency Other

**Why contact Info Line:** Case Status Inquiry Heard About Backlog

Want to Speak With Investigator Other

### Support Services / Referrals?

**Did caller use support services regarding incident?** Yes / No / Unknown

**What type of support services were used?** Crisis Hotline

Crisis Center or Shelter Formal Counseling

Family Support Non Family Support Spiritual Network Other

**Were referrals for support given** Yes / No

**Types of referrals given?**

SA/DV Services Shelter Legal

Law Enforcement Physical/Mental Health Other

**Notes:**

## Messages

|                                 |                   |                                   |           |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>ID:</b>                      | (Automatic)       | <b>**Empl. Obtaining Message:</b> | PAYROLL # |
| <b>**Type of Message:</b>       | Voicemail / Email |                                   |           |
| <b>**Date Message Checked:</b>  |                   | <b>**Time Message Checked:</b>    |           |
| <b>**Date Message Received:</b> |                   | <b>**Time Message Received:</b>   |           |

### Message Information

|                                   |          |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| <b>**Name Left on Message:</b>    |          |
| <b>**Phone Number on Message:</b> |          |
| <b>Other Phone Number(s):</b>     |          |
| <b>Email Left on Message:</b>     |          |
| <b>Best Time to Return Call:</b>  | Yes / No |

### Return Call?

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Attempted to Return Contact?</b>    | Yes / No |
| <b>Employee Returning Contact:</b>     |          |
| <b>Did employee speak with Caller?</b> | Yes / No |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>ID Number of Victim Information Card:</b> |  |
| <b>Preferred Language Spoken:</b>            |  |
| <b>Notes:</b>                                |  |