**TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS:**

We the undersigned advocates who work with survivors of sexual assault to find healing and recovery, members of law enforcement who investigate their cases, and prosecutors who hold their perpetrators accountable, write today to ask that you join us in our effort to give survivors the justice they deserve.

We urge Congress to prioritize the President’s budget request for $35 million in dedicated funding for competitive grants that will provide communities across the country with the vital resources they need to create a coordinated response to thousands of rape kits sitting untested in police storage facilities—from testing to prosecution, and each step in between.

Over the past five years, we have learned of large numbers of untested rape kits languishing in police departments across the country with alarming frequency: 12,500 in Los Angeles; 4,000 in Cleveland; 6,600 in Houston; 3,000 in Phoenix; 11,304 in Detroit; 12,164 in Memphis. Because most law enforcement agencies have not been required to report the number of untested kits in their custody, it’s likely the largest numbers in many of the communities we serve have yet to be discovered.

Untested rape kits represent lost opportunities for healing and justice for survivors, and accountability for perpetrators. But we know that testing is just the first step to comprehensive reform. Once a backlog is acknowledged and the first kits are sent out for testing, cities are left to grapple with the enormous task of not just finding a way to test all of their backlogged kits, but also figuring out how to investigate and prosecute these cases, re-engage survivors in the process, and address any systemic failures that led to the creation of the backlog in the first place.

This work takes political will, but it also takes significant resources, and up until now, finding the money has been a struggle for jurisdictions that want to enact a multi-disciplinary community approach to rape kit reform.

The new $35 million Department of Justice grant opportunity is a complement to, but different from, the Debbie Smith Act. Based on successful results from multi-disciplinary efforts in Detroit, Houston and other cities, this funding focuses exclusively on meeting community needs for investigation, prosecution and victim reengagement.

Those cities brought together law enforcement, prosecutors, victim advocates and crime labs to address untested rape kits in police storage facilities, to create multi-disciplinary teams to investigate and prosecute those cases, to conduct victim notifications and reengage victims with the criminal justice system and to develop and implement comprehensive policies to prevent future backlogs. Communities nationwide want the opportunity to follow these models and continue to build on this foundation.

**We urge you to fully fund this new program, which is endorsed by advocacy organizations and service providers from across the country.** For more information, please visit http://www.endthebacklog.org/government/35-million.

Thank you,