

## Congress Passes Important Anti-Rape Legislation

**September 27, 2008 – (Washington, DC)** – RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network), the nation’s largest anti-sexual assault organization, issued the following statement today regarding the passage of the Debbie Smith Reauthorization Act of 2008:



Reps. Maloney & Reichert  
with Debbie & Rob Smith

“The Debbie Smith Act is the most important piece of anti-rape legislation that Congress has ever passed, and its reauthorization is a victory for thousands of sexual assault victims whose perpetrators have yet to be identified. The bill extends critical funding for the processing of the DNA backlog of rape kits and other forensic evidence,” said Scott Berkowitz, president and founder of RAINN. “DNA has revolutionized the way that we identify perpetrators and prosecute rape cases in the 21st century, and thanks to the Debbie Smith Act reauthorization, law enforcement will continue to have the funding needed to identify rapists through DNA technology and keep them off of our streets.”

Congress made the processing of DNA from crime scenes a national priority by passing the Debbie Smith Act in 2004. RAINN applauds Congress for the reauthorization of the Debbie Smith Act in 2008, which will allow for the DNA program to fully realize its potential to solve rape cases and ensure justice for victims and their families. DNA evidence from rape cases not only helps police identify rapists in existing unsolved cases, but also prevents future assaults and spares potential new victims by bringing perpetrators to justice early in their criminal careers. Undeniably, prosecuting rapists early on is the single most effective rape prevention tool that we have available.

“There are still thousands of rape cases that remain unsolved, even though we have all the DNA evidence we need to find and convict the rapists. As a result, these rapists remain at large, finding new victims every single day,” said Berkowitz. “The Debbie Smith Act will allow for this backlogged evidence

to be processed faster so that we can more quickly identify rapists and put them behind bars where they belong.”

Debbie Smith, for whom the legislation is named after celebrated the passage of the reauthorization by saying, "I am thrilled that everyone is finally embracing the value of what this wonderful science, DNA, can do. I would like to thank each and every supporter, especially Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, RAINN, and the others who worked tirelessly to pass this legislation, ensuring that victims will remain a priority, and that we'll be one step closer to a safer world."

At the time of the 2004 act's passage, the U.S. Department of Justice estimated that there was a backlog of hundreds of thousands of unanalyzed DNA samples in state or local crime labs and at evidence warehouses across the United States. Thanks to the implementation of this legislation, of which RAINN was a key supporter, federal funding allowed the nation's crime labs to do more DNA analysis, thereby helping us reduce that DNA backlog. Unfortunately, the DNA backlog continues to be an issue today. In passing the Debbie Smith Reauthorization Act of 2008, Congress correctly recognizes that sex offenders generally strike more than once and that DNA analysis continues to be a priority.

"Every unprocessed rape kit represents a victim who has been denied justice," said Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), the bill's architect and chief supporter. "DNA evidence puts rapists behind bars. I am proud that Congress is again taking action to address the unconscionable backlog of DNA evidence in crime labs around the country. I want to thank RAINN and the bill's many supporters in the House and Senate for their hard work in getting this legislation through Congress."

"The use of forensic evidence in criminal cases is paramount to solving crimes," said Senator Richard Shelby (R-AL), a champion of the bill in the U.S. Senate. "Unfortunately, DNA backlogs have plagued our nation's law enforcement for many years, allowing criminals to remain on our streets. The Debbie Smith Act has been instrumental in allowing criminal investigators to identify and prosecute rapists in an efficient manner. It is critical that we continue our efforts to make our neighborhoods safe by taking these criminals off the streets and putting them behind bars."

RAINN commends U.S. Representatives Carolyn Maloney (D-NY), John Conyers (D-MI), Bobby Scott (D-VA), Louie Gohmert (R-TX), and Lamar Smith (R-TX) as well as U.S. Senators Joseph Biden (D-DE), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Jon Kyl (R-AZ), and Arlen Specter (R-PA), and nearly 50 bill co-sponsors for their wide bi-partisan support of this bill. We also thank Congressional appropriators – including especially Senators Richard Shelby (R-AL) and Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) and Representatives Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ), Alan Mollohan (D-WV), and Frank Wolf (R-VA), for ensuring that the Debbie Smith Act is funded every year.

## **About RAINN**

RAINN (Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network) is the nation's largest anti-sexual assault organization and was named one of "America's 100 Best Charities" by Worth magazine. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotlines (800.656.HOPE and rainn.org) in partnership with over 1,100 local rape crisis centers across the country. The hotlines have helped more than 1.2 million people since 1994. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual assault, help victims and ensure that rapists are brought to justice. For more information about RAINN, please visit rainn.org.

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