



DNA Backlog Clearance Project

Volume 2, Issue 4: December 2015

Focus of update:

This newsletter is designed to provide regular updates pertaining to the DNA Backlog Clearance Project. The project will continue until all testing is complete, reports issued by the external vendors, technical reviews finalized, and investigative follow up conducted. This edition will focus on updating stakeholders on progress made thus far on the investigation stage of this project.

CODIS Entries

CODIS entries to date	4,200**
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** These cases represent those where a profile was developed meeting CODIS guidelines and a CODIS entry has been completed.

Investigative Snapshot

The majority of the outsourced testing was finalized in 2015. During the course of 2015, the Special Victims Division's (SVD) Adult Sex Crimes and Child Sexual Abuse Units initiated over 500 investigations from January 1 through November 30, 2015. Investigations were opened due to receiving a CODIS match identifying a previously unknown suspect, a CODIS match corroborating the identity of an unconfirmed suspect, or a link to another case connecting a suspect to a particular case (Case-to-Case CODIS match). The reviews of the CODIS Ineligibles/Negatives were finalized, and over 2,000 reviews of CODIS Eligible cases were completed.

In 2015, over 30 new charges were filed as a result of CODIS investigations. The resulting new charges filed on the CODIS identified suspects are then processed through the District Attorney's office for case disposition. One investigation in which a CODIS match identified an unknown offender resulted in over 10 additional CODIS matches linked to the same serial suspect. The investigation took over two years and included tracking down multiple victims almost 20 years after their sexual assaults took place. The jury took less than an hour to return a guilty verdict on Herman Ray Whitfield for a 2008 sexual assault he committed while out on parole. As the District Attorney's office had 11 additional victims waiting their turn to provide testimony of their horrific attacks, a plea deal was struck on some of the remaining cases. The suspect received a life sentence for the 2008 case and three additional life sentences for three other cases, including a 1993 Aggravated Sexual Assault of a Child with a 12 year-old victim.

Investigative Follow-Up Case Assignment:

	Assigned	Completed
CODIS Matches ¹	1,200	1,129
CODIS Ineligibles / Negatives ²	5,108	5,089
CODIS Eligibles ³	2,327	2,192
Total to Date	8,635	8,410

Investigative Follow-Up Results:

	False Arrest	Arrest Confirmation	New Charges
Total to Date	0	132	66

Note: These figures refer exclusively to the City-funded portion of the DNA Backlog Clearance Project.

¹ DNA profile identified through DNA analysis, resulted from either a direct CODIS hit (individual) or linked to another case.

² Lab analysis provided no evidentiary leads. Testing complete.

³ Lab analysis has identified possible DNA evidence. Multiple outcomes possible, including entering unknown profile(s) into CODIS. Testing in-progress.

Introducing the new HPD Justice Advocate

Meulen Bajo-Niebla officially joined HPD's Special Victim Division (SVD) as their Justice Advocate in October 2015, replacing Emily Burton-Blank. Ms. Bajo-Niebla comes to us from the Houston Area Women's Center, where she was the Sexual Assault Services Coordinator providing crisis intervention counseling, advocacy, and group and individual counseling to survivors. She also trained and supervised interns, volunteers, and other staff for the Adult Sexual Assault Program. One of Meulen Bajo-Niebla's first priorities in her role of Justice Advocate was to introduce herself to the many local agencies that provide services to SVD's complainants, including local universities, community based organizations, other law enforcement agencies, and hospitals. Since joining HPD's SVD, she has coordinated and successfully organized a meeting and site visit with Harris County Health System Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE's) and Adult Sex Crimes Unit investigators. Intent to build upon a strong foundation of education and outreach, Meulen Bajo-Niebla is excited and committed to having a positive impact on SVD's victim-centered approach to sexual assault investigations.