

Friday, October 16, 2020

Newly-Awarded \$1,000,000 Grant Will Help Launch G.O.L.D. Unit, Focus On Genealogical Testing of 20 Most Wanted Cold Case Rapists

CLEVELAND – Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Michael C. O'Malley announced that the Cuyahoga County Prosecutor's Office (CCPO) Sexual Assault Kit Task Force (SAKTF) was awarded a \$1,000,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ). The funds will go towards personnel staffing, victim advocacy and research partnerships, training, and other resources. This grant, along with prior USDOJ funding, will also help launch the office's newly-formed G.O.L.D. Unit (Genetic Operations Linking DNA). The GOLD Unit's work will include:

- Expanding SAKTF investigations to include sexual assault kits (SAKs) submitted from 2012 to 2019
- Genealogical testing of cold case sexual assaults
- Genealogical testing of cold case sexually-motivated homicides
- Continuing the Lawfully Owed DNA project

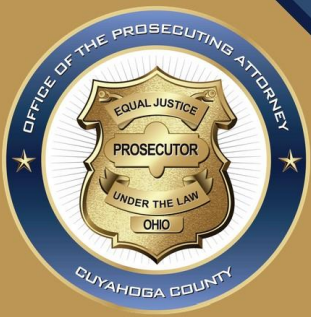
"We are excited to announce this new unit whose genetically-focused operations will utilize the newest forms of technology to identify violent predators and bring them to long-overdue justice," said Special Investigations Division Chief Richard Bell. "These horrific cases forever change victims' lives, but it is our hope through this new technology, that we will finally be able to provide a sense of closure for them."

Task Force History

In 2013, the CCPO assembled the SAKTF to address investigative leads that resulted from the testing of previously unsubmitted rape kits primarily between 1993 to 2011. Since its inception, the Task Force has completed 7,026 investigations that have resulted in 817 defendants indicted, the highest number of any SAKTF in the country. The number of indictments include 915 victims as several defendants are convicted or alleged serial offenders. Of those cases, the Task Force has secured a 93.3% conviction rate with offenders' average prison sentence being over 10 years.

Expanding Operations

As the original 7,026 investigations neared completion, the CCPO contacted the Cleveland Division of Police (CPD) Sex Crimes Unit who indicated there was a need for further investigation on SAKs that have been tested by the Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner's Office (CCMEO) between 2012 and 2019. The new grant will provide funding for G.O.L.D. Unit members (i.e. investigators, prosecuting attorneys, and victim advocates) to conduct follow-up investigations and review unknown DNA profiles to determine if they may be eligible for additional testing with new technology.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

A Focus On Genealogy

Investigations conducted by the SAKTF have led to 170 “John Doe” indictments to date, 13 of which have been identified due to subsequent arrests and/or convictions. “John Does” are unknown DNA profiles that have not produced a match in the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) – the FBI’s national DNA database. The G.O.L.D. Unit has begun a pilot project that has contracted with a private lab that will conduct genealogical searches for 20 profiles. These 20 “Most Wanted” profiles were carefully selected after an extensive review process that considered serial offenders, stranger sexual assaults, and other relevant facts of each case. The grant will help cover the costs of the genealogical testing and resources needed for follow-up investigation.

The pilot project will also help develop protocols and best practices for future genealogical testing, including that of cold case sexually-motivated homicides. There are 32 of these types of cases that have been identified for potential genealogical review due to finding an unknown DNA profile that has no match in CODIS. G.O.L.D. Unit investigators will be assigned to follow up on various aspects of each case.

Commitment to Lawfully Owed DNA

This funding will also be used to expand the research and operations of the Unit’s Lawfully Owed DNA Project. It will help researchers review, improve, and optimize swabbing protocols as they relate to the collection of lawfully owed DNA from offenders. Prior funding led to the creation of a census that identified 15,371 offenders whose DNA was not inputted in CODIS. Since then, 2,441 offenders have been swabbed, 87 of which produced a CODIS “hit” to another crime (including murder, sexual assault, robbery, and others). Further research will focus on quantitative and qualitative analyses of county felony arrest data, DNA collection procedures at booking, and law enforcement personnel interviews which will assist in the collection of the nearly 13,000 offenders that still lawfully owe DNA in Cuyahoga County.

The SAKTF is led by the CCPO and includes the Cleveland Police Department, Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Cuyahoga County Sheriff’s Department, Cuyahoga County Medical Examiner’s Office, Case Western Reserve University, and the Cleveland Rape Crisis Center.