



DNA Backlog Clearance Project

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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	4,187**
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** These cases represent those where a profile was developed meeting CODIS guidelines and a CODIS entry has been completed.

Justice in All Forms

Simply because a CODIS match case does not result in a new charge being filed does not equate to a lack of justice on behalf of victims. The oldest sexual assault kit in the HPD Property Room was from 1982, for an adult victim of sexual assault. The statute of limitations (SOL) for adult victims is only 10 years, and while there is no SOL for victims under the age of 17 now, there are past cases in which it had expired. Many victims, contacted upon a CODIS match after a sometimes lengthy delay, do not wish to reengage in that painful part of their past. Other victims cannot be found. Due to these reasons, an investigator cannot file a new criminal charge against the perpetrator.

However, as law enforcement, we want to maintain our duty to keep the public safe and ensure some measure of justice is served for victims. As an example, an offender was found to be linked to 4 CODIS matches. Two of the complainants advised investigators they did not wish to participate in the re-opened investigations. One complainant could not be located, and the SOL had expired on another case. The offender was found to be incarcerated in Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) for failing to comply as a registered sex offender. The assigned investigator wrote a letter to the TDCJ Victim Services unit advising them of the 4 current CODIS matches on the offender, and the lack of new criminal charges. The investigator was contacted by TDCJ and advised the Parole Board had agreed to release the offender. However, upon learning of the 4 CODIS matches, the board immediately reversed their decision and the offender remains incarcerated in TDCJ currently, with no scheduled release date until a sentence completion date in 2021.

Investigative Follow-Up Case Assignment:

	Assigned	Completed
CODIS Matches ¹	1,126	1,047
CODIS Ineligibles / Negatives ²	5,023	5,004
CODIS Eligibles ³	2,327	2,192
Total to Date	8,476	8,243

Investigative Follow-Up Results:

	False Arrest	Arrest Confirmation	New Charges
Total to Date	0	128	59

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.

A New Beginning for the Justice Advocate

Emily Burton-Blank had a permanent impact in defining the role of Justice Advocate for the Houston Police Department. She developed procedures for minimizing the traumatization of victims of sexual assault upon being contacted by investigators, provided compassionate support and opened communication to victims throughout the course of the criminal investigation. Her work increased participation by building trust between the survivor and law enforcement. She built and strengthened relationships between the HPD and community-based organizations, expanding services available for survivors. Her passionate advocacy brought significant changes to the HPD and set us on a victim-centered path for all sexual assault investigations. Her positive energy and everyday smile will be missed, as she moved with her husband to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in July. Before leaving, Emily Burton-Blank assisted in finding her replacement, as the Houston Police Department remains committed to best practices in our victim-centered sexual assault investigations.