

CONGRESSMAN DAVE REICHERT

Statement before the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Hearing on the Reauthorization and Improvement of DNA Initiatives of the Justice For All Act of 2004
April 10, 2008

Thank you Chairman Conyers, Ranking Member Smith, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Gohmert for the opportunity to be here this morning. I am pleased to share with you my experience with forensic DNA technology and the critical role that technology played in bringing a serial killer to justice and providing answers to the questions the victims' families had been asking for many years.

Before coming to Congress, I spent over 30 years in law enforcement in the King County Sheriff's Office, in Seattle, Washington. I have personally witnessed how forensic DNA has closed unsolved rapes and homicides in Washington State. For 20 years I was involved in the case of the Green River Killer, in which at least 48 women were found murdered throughout King County, Washington; the first five were found along the Green River and so it was called the Green River Task Force. DNA evidence played a central role in this investigation and ultimately led to the conviction of Gary Ridgway.

Ridgway became a suspect early in the investigation but after passing a polygraph test and with no physical evidence to link him to the crimes, he walked free. Police collected bodily fluids from the first victims found in 1982, and first took hair and saliva samples from Ridgway in 1987. At the time, the technology did not exist to compare these samples with the evidence collected at the crime scenes. These samples were later subjected to DNA analysis. When the tests came back on September 10, 2001, the DNA from 3 of the 48 victims was attributed to one suspect, Gary Ridgway. It is incredible that nearly two decades later, thanks to advancements in DNA technology, a small saliva sample compared with the first crime scene evidence from 1982 would prove the key to unlocking one of the most notorious serial murder cases in our history. Gary Ridgway pled guilty to 48 separate counts of murder and later admitted to having sex with and killing over 70 women. He is now serving life in prison.

I cannot speak enough about the importance of DNA analysis to law enforcement and to the victims and their families. DNA analysis is a powerful tool that can potentially help solve hundreds of cases where no known suspect currently exists. Unfortunately, there is a severe backlog for DNA testing. It is a real tragedy that we have the technology needed to bring offenders to justice and peace to their victims, yet we're unable to fully utilize it.

For victims of rape and sexual assault, DNA promises the opportunity to finally reclaim their lives – their sense of security, confidence, and independence that only comes after knowing their offender is

caught and behind bars. Today, an alarming 1 in 6 women and 1 in 33 men have experienced an attempted or completed rape, and 1 out of 4 college-aged women have been sexually assaulted. In 2006, there were over 270,000 victims of rape, attempted rape, or sexual assault in the United States. Sex crimes are one of the most personal, offensive, and destructive crimes. Often victims are never able to fully recover from the psychological and emotional distress associated with the offense. DNA has the unequalled ability to identify rapists, bring them to justice, and grant peace of mind to victims. We owe it to our daughters, sisters, and neighbors to do everything in our power to eliminate the DNA backlog so rapists are taken off the streets and prevented from claiming more innocent victims.

The bottom line is the FBI and state and local law enforcement must eliminate the backlog and get the DNA samples into the system. It is the only way the DNA does all that it's capable of.

I commend the Judiciary Committee for taking up this charge to eliminate the DNA backlog through the reauthorization of the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program. This program goes a long way towards helping states and local government eliminate the current backlog of unprocessed DNA samples so that dangerous perpetrators like Gary Ridgway can be caught and communities across our nation will be safer.

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