



Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection

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More Help is Available from DESPP Forensic Lab to Help Crack Cold Cases

Forensic genealogy helped solve two notorious serial sexual assault cases in recent years in Connecticut and now the Division of Scientific Services at the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection has grants available to police departments and prosecutors for long dormant cold cases.

“We are focusing on cases that were tested anytime from the 1970s or 1980s to very recently and they just don’t have any investigative leads that are useful,” said Sevasti Papakanakis, Deputy Director of Forensic Biology/DNA for the Division of Scientific Services, also known as the state forensic lab.

Forensic genealogy is attracting growing interest as investigators use DNA analysis and traditional genealogy research to turn up new leads for unsolved violent crimes, often in cases that are decades old. By comparing DNA samples from a crime scene to the millions of DNA samples now publicly available through genealogical companies, investigators can link a family tree to a particular suspect.

“In forensic genealogy you are using public databases that can be used to link family trees and find a possible relative to a possible perpetrator,” Papakanakis said. “There are so many cases we have in this state that haven’t been solved.”

In Connecticut, leads developed through forensic genealogy led to the conviction in 2022 of Michael Sharpe, a former charter school administrator in the Hartford area, after investigators used genealogy databases to link him to the sexual assaults of four women in 1984. Police used the DNA samples Sharpe’s relatives had submitted to GEDMatch, a genealogy website. In another case, police arrested Angelo Alleano of Vernon using DNA data publicly available from a specific family tree. He later pleaded guilty to four counts of sexual assault.

The average cost of analyzing a DNA sample is about \$7,500. Grants are now available to cover the costs of the additional genealogy research.

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