



**Testimony of James Owens  
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**Before the House Judiciary Committee**

**Regarding DNA Collection**

**November 12, 2013**

Good Morning Chairman Marsico, Chairman Caltagirone and members of the House Judiciary Committee. My name is James Owens; I am a detective in the Special Investigations Division of Philadelphia Police Department's Special Victims Unit. I have been a Philadelphia Police Officer for nineteen years and a detective with the Special Victims Unit since December of 1999.

The Special Victims Unit investigates cases of sexual assault and child abuse. Within that Unit, the Special Investigations Division handles high-profile cases, cold cases and cases of serial offenders. DNA evidence is the backbone of many of these cases. DNA collection and analysis is a critical tool in our investigations and I am honored to testify before you on this important topic.

Expanding DNA collection would have a significant impact on the work of law enforcement. It would aid our efforts to investigate and solve cases and help get violent criminals off of the streets. As violent criminals are apprehended more quickly, victims and communities can be put at ease. DNA collection limits the opportunity for a criminal to reoffend, which contributes to public safety.

But I will leave the public policy debate to others. Instead, let me give you just a few real-world cases that illustrated the importance of DNA collection:

- **Dominique Wilson.** On a fall day in 2008, Dominique Wilson broke into an apartment in Center City, Philadelphia. Inside, he found a young woman and her boyfriend. Wilson tied up, robbed and assaulted the boyfriend. And then, as her boyfriend listened, he raped and robbed the young woman. She later told the judge that Wilson "destroyed every part of my life," and as a result of the attacks, "my fear is practically constant."

Just before Christmas, Wilson broke into another apartment in the University City section of Philadelphia. This time, he found two young women inside-- both were Penn students. He threatened them with a gun and a knife, bound and gagged them with duct tape and then raped one of the women.

Four days later, a DNA test confirmed that the DNA was the same in both cases -- yet the identity of the perpetrator was not known.

Less than two months later, Dominique Wilson struck again, this time with a home invasion rape of three women in Clinton County. Local law enforcement arrested him on a bench warrant, and, upon finding evidence connecting him to the Clinton County incidents, obtained a search warrant for his DNA. Less than a month later, CODIS revealed that this DNA matched that found in the Philadelphia cases.

One newspaper dubbed Dominique Wilson "Pennsylvania's Own Monster" and, having come to know these young victims, I found that to be a fitting description. Their lives

will never be the same, and these cases may never have been solved without the CODIS database.

- **Tyree Miles.** Between 2005 and 2006, Tyree Miles raped three women in West Philadelphia. In 2008, the local DNA database connected the DNA from each of the crimes, determining that all of the rapes were committed by the same perpetrator. Two months later, CODIS returned a match with Miles' sample, which had been taken following a felony drug conviction in 2006.
- **Troy Graves.** Dubbed "The Center City Rapist," Troy Graves raped six women, murdering one, in Philadelphia over the course of two years in the late 1990s. DNA tests linked the Philadelphia crimes to one another, but were unable to identify the perpetrator since Graves had no prior convictions and his DNA profile was not in the CODIS offender database. The break in the case came when CODIS connected the Philadelphia forensic profiles to a series of rapes in Fort Collins, Colorado. Police used this key new piece of information – that the perpetrator had lived in both Colorado and Philadelphia – to catch Graves.
- **Otis Wilkerson.** Otis Wilkerson is a serial rapist who committed three attacks between 2002 and 2005. In two instances, he targeted strangers on the street. One victim was riding down the street on her bicycle when Wilkerson approached her, held a box cutter to her, pulled her into a nearby vacant lot, and raped her. Wilkerson employed the same scheme in each instance – holding a knife to his victim and dragging them to a deserted area, where he would rape them. Ultimately, a CODIS match linked the three cases.
- **Steve Wooden.** One morning in 2007, Steve Wooden walked into a neighborhood dry cleaning store and found the 54-year-old Korean female owner, alone. He simulated that he had a gun and demanded the woman empty her cash register, containing only \$100. He then forced her to the back of the store and brutally raped her.

The victim did not know her attacker, and the investigation was at an impasse. Fortunately, a DNA sample was recovered on the rape kit and submitted to the CODIS system. The sample matched DNA recovered from a crime scene in Wilmington, Delaware and matched the defendant's sample. Based on that information, we showed the complainant a photo array and she was able to identify Steve Wooden as the attacker. We interviewed Wooden and he admitted to raping the complainant. As a result of the crime, the complainant is still unable to return to her business unaccompanied and continues to suffer the effects, both emotionally and financially.

- **Lionel Rivera.** In 2007, Lionel Rivera raped two young women within months of each other. Neither woman was able to identify the attacker - we were even unaware that the rapes were committed by the same person. Fortunately, DNA was recovered in both cases. It was entered into the CODIS system, which not only provided the link between the two assaults, but the identity of the perpetrator.
- **Derrick Cook.** In August 2008, a 23-year-old woman was walking down the street when she was grabbed from behind and forced, at gunpoint into a nearby lot. Her attacker then raped and physically assaulted her. The victim was unable to identify her attacker, but a rape kit was completed and DNA evidence was recovered. Approximately three months later, a second young woman was raped and stabbed by Derrick Cook. As we investigated that case, we noticed a striking resemblance to the first case. A DNA sample was obtained from Derrick Cook and matched DNA recovered from the rape kits of both victims.

I hope these cases provide some insight into how essential the CODIS system is to my work. As with any database, the success of the CODIS database depends largely on the amount of information it contains. It is only logical that the more DNA profiles entered into CODIS, the greater the likelihood of "hits" or matches. The current CODIS database includes over ten million DNA offender profiles and has produced over 222,000 hits, aiding 213,500 different criminal investigations. As a growing number of states collect arrestee DNA samples, the database becomes increasingly more useful.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to discuss these comments further and answer any questions you might have.