

The National Commission on the Future of DNA Evidence

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When Attorney General Janet Reno read that DNA evidence exonerated an individual wrongfully convicted after serving many years in a Maryland prison, she raised concerns about the extent to which similar cases existed. In April of 1997, a focus group including representatives from a broad spectrum of the criminal justice system, met in Washington DC to discuss the issues related to the future of forensic DNA. The scope and breadth of the issues raised at this forum were so broad that the Attorney General requested that the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) establish a national commission to examine the future of DNA and how the Justice Department could best encourage its effective use. In March of 1998, the National Commission on the Future of DNA Evidence was charged with making recommendations to the Attorney General that will allow her to be proactive in the application of an extremely powerful crime fighting tool.

The goal of the Commission is to maximize the use of DNA evidence in the Criminal Justice system. Five general areas have been identified where recommendations would afford the most effect, and five corresponding working groups have been established to provide the Commission with background and synthesis for their recommendations. These areas and working groups are: Post-conviction Issues, Crime Scene and Investigation Issues, Legal Issues, Laboratory Funding Issues and Research and Development Issues.

This panel, comprised of the Commissioners who chair the Working Groups, their Reporters, and the Commission's Executive Director and Deputy, will discuss the structure of the Commission and Working Groups, the individual issues that have and will arise in each area and the interconnected nature of those issues. The panel's purpose is to stimulate discussion, suggestions and recommendation directly from the scientific community.