

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF DNA EVIDENCE

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The National Commission on the Future of DNA Evidence was created in 1998 at the request of Attorney General Janet Reno. When she read about the use of DNA to exonerate someone wrongfully convicted of rape and homicide, she became concerned that others might also have been wrongly convicted. The Attorney General then directed the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to identify how often DNA had exonerated wrongfully convicted defendants. After extensive study, NIJ published the report *Convicted by Juries, Exonerated by Science: Case Studies in the Use of DNA Evidence to Establish Innocence After Trial* which presents case studies of 28 inmates for who DNA analysis was exculpatory. Today, at least 61 people have been exonerated of the crimes for which they were originally imprisoned, often on death row.

After learning of the breadth and scope of the issues related to forensic DNA, the Attorney General asked NIJ to establish the Commission as a means to examine how the Justice Department could encourage its most effective use in the future. The Commission consists of representatives from prosecution, the defense bar, law enforcement, the scientific community, the medical examiner community, academia, and victims' rights organizations. It has already provided the Attorney General with recommendations that will directly impact the forensic DNA community by increasing the criminal justice system's demand for high quality, rapid DNA evidence profiling.

This presentation will discuss the Commission's progress to date including its recommendations to the Attorney General regarding the elimination of the CODIS database backlog, arrestee DNA sampling, law enforcement training for DNA identification, preservation and collection and the application of DNA to postconviction cases.