



Testing Backlogged Sexual Assault Kits

BY THE NUMBERS:

\$80 million
Manhattan DA + U.S. DOJ

Manhattan District Attorney's Office
\$38 million in funding

70,000 kits
Manhattan DA + U.S. DOJ

U.S. Department of Justice
\$41 million in funding

DNA Evidence From Rape Kits Helps . . .

- o **Solve crimes in New York State:** In the mid-nineties, an unidentified man raped three schoolgirls in Rochester, New York. The rapist was not apprehended until an out-of-state DNA hit ten years later. Like many rapists, **Keith Lamar Laster** was a recidivist, and after being charged with raping a woman in Alabama, surrendered a DNA sample which was entered into the national database. After Laster's DNA matched the DNA evidence from the Rochester rapes, he was convicted at trial, and is now serving 146 years in prison.
- o **Solve crimes in other states:** In 2005, **Clarence Williams** was arrested in Atlanta, Georgia, after attempting to purchase a shotgun. Prosecutors discovered two warrants for his arrest in New York City, issued after the defendant jumped bail in 1978 while awaiting retrials on two rape cases. Manhattan prosecutors preparing to extradite Williams reexamined his old file, and tested a pair of underwear using previously unavailable DNA technology. Williams was not only confirmed as the attacker in the 1978 cold cases, but connected to nine unsolved rapes and robberies in Silver Spring, Maryland.
- o **Exonerate the innocent:** **Michael Mercer** spent twelve years behind bars for a 1991 rape on a Harlem rooftop that he did not commit, and might still be in prison today were it not for the City's "forklift" approach to eliminating the rape kit backlog, testing each and every kit, even in closed cases. Mercer was freed from prison within days after a DNA hit confirmed that the rape was committed by another man with a long history of burglary and sexual assault.

CASE STUDY: **Detroit, Michigan**

In 2009, the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office discovered more than 11,000 untested rape kits while touring an abandoned police warehouse in Detroit. Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy sought and received funding to test a random sample of 400 kits, which generated so many leads that the National Institute of Justice funded the testing of an additional 1,600 kits. Encouraged by the results, the State of Michigan granted the city \$4 million toward testing kits, which was supplemented by private donations and funds raised by Enough SAID, a coalition of the Michigan Women's Foundation, Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, and Detroit Crime Commission.

As of August 2015, Detroit has tested approximately 10,000 kits, resulting in 2,478 DNA matches and the identification of 477 potential serial rapists. The Wayne County Prosecutor's Office has obtained 21 convictions, and DNA from the kits tested linked to crimes committed in 39 states.