

BUREAU OF JUSTICE ASSISTANCE FACT SHEET

POSTCONVICTION TESTING OF DNA EVIDENCE

The Postconviction Testing of DNA Evidence Program funds projects that assist states and units of local government with postconviction DNA testing in cases of violent felony offenses where actual innocence might be demonstrated. This supports the Department of Justice's mission "to ensure fair and impartial administration of justice for all Americans." While successful exonerations to correct injustice are notable program outcomes, the careful review, consideration, and closing of cases subjected to postconviction DNA testing that do not ultimately demonstrate innocence also work to advance the public's interest that justice has been fairly applied.

Program Goals

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) Postconviction Testing of DNA Evidence Program aims to assist in:

1. Identifying potential postconviction DNA testing cases.
2. Reviewing appropriate postconviction cases to identify those in which DNA testing could prove the actual innocence of a person convicted of a violent felony offense as defined by state law.
3. Locating biological evidence associated with such postconviction cases.
4. Performing DNA analysis of appropriate biological evidence, and reporting and reviewing the DNA test results.

Program Funding and Awards

Year	Site-Based Awarded Funding
FY 2008	\$7,821,741
FY 2009	\$9,854,562
FY 2010	\$1,565,911
FY 2011	\$7,429,009
FY 2012	\$3,546,504
FY 2013	\$3,315,873
FY 2014	\$3,593,453
FY 2015	\$3,555,053
FY 2016	\$3,596,910
FY 2017	\$3,313,287
FY 2018	\$5,449,201
FY 2019	\$5,450,811
FY 2020	\$6,186,277
FY 2021	\$9,774,061
FY 2022	\$7,708,003
FY 2023	\$5,755,000
Total	\$87,915,656

Program Accomplishments

- 121 total funded awards.
- \$87,915,656 total funding amount.
- More than 180,000 cases reviewed.
- More than 700,000 hours of case review performed.
- More than 300 profiles uploaded into the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS).





Recent Exonerations

Martin Santillan – In 1998, Mr. Santillan was convicted of murder and sentenced to life in prison. After serving 25 years, Mr. Santillan was exonerated and released from prison in Dallas County, TX. Additionally, DNA evidence linked to another suspect, who was later arrested.

Albert Ian Schweitzer – Mr. Schweitzer was sentenced to 130 years in prison for rape, kidnapping, and murder charges. He and two additional defendants were arrested and charged with the crimes in 1997 and convicted in 2000. After serving 23 years in a Hawaii prison, Mr. Schweitzer and the other defendants were eliminated as contributors to DNA samples collected from the crime scene and an “unknown male” suspect was identified.

Louis Wright – Mr. Wright was convicted in 1988 for the rape of an 11-year-old girl. He was sentenced to 25 to 50 years, serving 35 years of that sentence in a Michigan state prison. Mr. Wright was exonerated in 2023 after DNA testing performed on the sexual assault kit excluded him as the source of the biological evidence.

Gerardo Cabanillas – Mr. Cabanillas served 28 years in a Los Angeles, CA, prison. At the age of 18, he was sentenced to 87 years to life in prison for sexual assault, kidnapping, and robbery. In 2023, Mr. Cabanillas was exonerated after DNA testing revealed he was innocent of those crimes. The results of the DNA testing identified the profile of a suspect in a murder that occurred five years after the sexual assault occurred. A partial profile of a second male was found. Mr. Cabanillas was excluded from both DNA profiles.

Program Accomplishments (cont.)

- More than 100 CODIS hits.
- More than 2,000 cases where DNA analysis was performed.
- Though exonerations are not the sole measure of program success, 64 exonerations have resulted from this program representing more than 1,400 years served in prison.

Additional Information

- BJA Program Web Page: <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/postconviction-testing-dna-evidence/overview>
- National Registry of Exonerations: <http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx>

ABOUT BJA

BJA helps America’s state, local, and tribal jurisdictions reduce and prevent crime, lower recidivism, and promote a fair and safe criminal justice system. BJA provides a wide range of resources—including grants, funding, and training and technical assistance—to law enforcement, courts and corrections agencies, treatment providers, reentry practitioners, justice information sharing professionals, and community-based partners to address chronic and emerging criminal justice challenges nationwide. To learn more about BJA, visit bja.ojp.gov or follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/DOJBJA) and X (@DOJBJA). BJA is a component of the Department of Justice’s Office of Justice Programs.