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DNA Profiling System Continues Success

If you heard of a program that could solve more than one homicide or sexual assault case every week, you would think it was too good to be true. This week I would like to bring you up to speed on just such a program, which I believe is changing the way we fight crime in Missouri.

The program I'm referring to is Missouri's "all-felon" DNA Profiling System. It was expanded in 2005 after my colleagues in the General Assembly joined with me to pass legislation I sponsored requiring the state to take DNA samples of all felony offenders. This has dramatically increased the number of cold cases law enforcement has been able to solve. Previously, the law only allowed the testing of certain violent or sexual offenders.

These DNA samples can be shared among police departments throughout the nation, via the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), and are used to match DNA taken from other crime scenes. In the past year and a half, the expanded system has resulted in approximately 410 positive matches that would not have been discovered under previous guidelines. Of the 410 crimes solved by the new "all-felon" testing program, 36 are homicides and 61 are rape and sexual assault cases. In that same time period, DNA samples have resulted in matches for hundreds of other cases, including auto theft and burglary.

The older system would not have produced these arrests, and many of these criminals could have been back on the streets.

It is clear that "all-felon" testing has resulted in the resolution of crimes that would not otherwise be solved. This is due to the fact that many individuals who are incarcerated for lesser crimes are often found to be guilty of violent crimes that had previously gone unsolved. This new program is proving once again that justice will prevail and criminals ultimately will be captured and punished.

One particularly shocking DNA match occurred Jan. 6 of this year when a Missouri man was arrested on a drug charge and found to be a murderer. Detectives used a national DNA database to track down the suspect, who was being held at the St. Louis Justice Center on the drug charge, and charged him with the sexual assault and murder of a 90-year-old woman from Lafayette, Calif.

This despicable crime might never have been solved if the law enforcement officials had not had access to the suspect's DNA. Without this common-sense program, the victim's family might never have known who was responsible for such a reprehensible deed, and a community would have lived in fear of the unknown assailant. More important, it was only a matter of time before this predator would have struck again.

Missouri's new DNA Profiling System has proven an effective tool in helping law enforcement take our worst criminals off the street.

If you have comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov or by phone at (888) 711-9278.

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