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NEWS RELEASE

February 28, 2023

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Ramsey County Attorney and Law Enforcement Officials Push for Funding to Support Faster DNA Testing

Ramsey County Attorney Choi providing short-term funding to help state crime lab address historic evidence testing backlog; joins with local and state law enforcement leaders to push for permanent legislative funding to address issue.

Saint Paul, MN – Ramsey County Attorney John Choi and law enforcement leaders in Ramsey County are raising alarms about how the recent surge in violent crime has created an unprecedented demand for forensic testing that the state crime lab is currently unable to meet, leading to significantly longer waits for DNA testing results. They are joining with the Governor and Department of Public Safety in asking the legislature to provide ongoing funding to address the backlog of cases. In the interim, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office is providing funding for one year to the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) for resources to expedite evidence testing for Ramsey County.

A standard turnaround time for evidence processing should be 30 days. Currently, the BCA has a significant backlog of cases in line for testing with some delayed as long as a year. Minnesota saw a 30-percent increase in violent crime and a 109-percent increase in gun-related crime from 2019 to 2022. This was preceded by 10-to-15-percent increases annually from 2015 to 2019. These increases resulted in evidence being submitted for testing that created a backlog that is approximately triple the BCA’s testing capacity.

To help alleviate this backlog short-term, the Ramsey County Attorney’s Office is providing funding to the BCA that will enable them to dedicate resources and prioritize forensic DNA analysis of Ramsey County’s firearm-related cases.

To fix the problem long-term, Governor Tim Walz and Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan are recommending to the legislature \$6,164,000 in fiscal year 2024 and \$5,131,000 in ongoing funding starting in fiscal year 2025 so that the BCA can add the resources necessary to bring evidence testing time down to 30 days. *See included Department of Public Safety information for more details.*

“This backlog puts public safety at risk and unacceptably slows the process of justice. I am grateful to be able to provide some funding to address this in the short-term. I encourage all of our legislators to support this critical funding request from the Governor to solve this problem long-term for the entire State of Minnesota,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi.

“Our communities expect, and deserve, us to solve crimes as quickly as possible. We need to provide the necessary resources to meet the reality of the current need and ensure justice for the victims of crime,” said Maplewood Police Chief Brian Bierdeman.

“We recognize that more resources are needed to keep pace with the extraordinary increase in demand for forensic testing. Governor Walz’s and Lt. Gov. Flanagan’s budget proposal will allow the BCA to meet the current demand, providing consistent turnaround times that will keep the criminal justice system moving forward. This request to the legislature is a priority item for the Department of Public Safety and we appreciate the support of local public safety leaders in this effort,” said Department of Public Safety Commissioner Bob Jacobson.

“Our forensic scientists are completing testing at a historic pace, but at current staffing cannot keep pace with the demand,” said BCA Superintendent Drew Evans. “With the Governor’s and Lt. Governor’s requested funding we will be able to dramatically shorten turnaround times for local agencies and further investigations for all crime victims.”

Note: Contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.