

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



## Georgia Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Expanded

ATLANTA (January 27, 2020) — The Georgia Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) is pleased to announce the expansion of the Georgia Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (GA SAKI). Up until now, the GA SAKI Task Force (Task Force) has been solely focused on leading the investigation and prosecution of cold case sexual assaults that result from testing previously unsubmitted or untested sexual assault kits. This expansion will allow the Task Force to use grant funds obtained by CJCC to aid jurisdictions statewide in the investigation and genetic testing of cold case homicides with sexual assault components and in unidentified serial sexual assault cases.

To date, the Task Force has been fully operational for over a year and has indicted 23 cases and convicted 4 rapists. Of those convictions, 3 were serial rapists. The Task Force and its partner agencies' goal remains to provide victims with comprehensive case assistance. This assistance begins the moment there is a Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) hit, continues through investigation and prosecution, and includes dedicated victim advocacy to ensure a trauma-informed system of care (CJCC partnered with LiveSAFE Resources to provide advocacy to all victims served by the Task Force).

To advance the expansion, Keith Howard, of the Morgan County Sheriff's Office, and Georgia's only active law enforcement certified criminal profiler, has joined the Task Force in a consulting capacity to work directly with local jurisdictions to seek justice for families of unsolved homicide cases. As part of this expanded focus, members of the Task Force have already been instrumental in the identification of 4 of the 5 confirmed Georgia victims of serial killer, Samuel Little.

Additionally, CJCC will provide funding for genetic genealogy testing in cold case homicides with sexual assault components and unidentified serial sexual assault cases. Genetic genealogy is the use of DNA profiling and DNA testing, in combination with traditional genealogical methods, to infer biological relationships between individuals. It has been used by law enforcement agencies nationwide to locate perpetrators of violent crimes and to identify deceased individuals.

CJCC Executive Director Jay Neal, expressed his support of the expanded project stating, "We are pleased to continue to provide resources needed to achieve long-awaited justice for victims and families of violent crime in Georgia."

“Collaborative partnerships such as the GA SAKI Task Force are crucial in achieving justice for crime victims and holding serial offenders accountable. We are proud to be a part of this critical effort,” said PAC Executive Director Pete Skandalakis.

“The expansion of this initiative is critical to our work,” said DeKalb County District Attorney Sherry Boston. “Our collaboration has yielded positive results with the identification and subsequent prosecution of violent offenders. Additional resources will serve to bolster our efforts and strengthen our resolve to secure justice for victims and loved ones.”

“The Cobb County District Attorney’s Office has already benefited from the genetic genealogy funding provided under this new initiative. Our Georgia SAKI Task Force members and Cold Case Unit resolved a serial case because of this opportunity, and we are very grateful for the assistance,” said Joyette Holmes, Cobb County District Attorney.

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#### **About the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC)**

Created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1981 as an Executive Branch agency, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) represents the culmination of many efforts to establish a statewide body that would build consensus and unity among the State's diverse and interdependent, criminal justice system components. For more information visit the CJCC website: <https://cjcc.georgia.gov/>.

#### **About the Georgia Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Task Force (GA SAKI Task Force)**

Since 2017, with CJCC’s receipt of a \$3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI), the GA SAKI Task Force has been focused on leading the investigation and prosecution of cold case sexual assaults that result from testing previously unsubmitted or untested sexual assault kits. CJCC is collaborating with the following partner agencies on the GA SAKI Task Force: the Prosecuting Attorneys’ Council of Georgia (PAC), the Cobb County District Attorney’s Office, the DeKalb County District Attorney’s Office, and the Sexual Assault Response Team (SART) State Expert Committee.

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