

United States Senate

April 6, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Chairman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Commerce, Justice, & Science Subcommittee
521 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Vice Chairwoman
Senate Appropriations Committee
Commerce, Justice, & Science Subcommittee
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Shaheen:

We write to thank you for your work in providing resources for programs critical to public safety and express our strong support for one of these programs: the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program, which helps law enforcement and forensic labs keep up with the increasing demand for DNA analysis. We request that you provide sufficient funding in fiscal year (FY) 2021 for vital DNA-related and forensic programs. In addition, we request language be included once again to ensure the DNA funding be used solely for purposes specific to DNA backlog reduction and capacity enhancement.

Since the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program was first authorized in 2004, it has provided states with desperately needed help and resources to carry out DNA analyses of backlogged evidence, particularly rape kits. In 2019, Congress again showed its overwhelming bipartisan support for this initiative by passing the Debbie Smith Reauthorization Act (P.L. 116-104), which extends this program through FY 2024. Using this federal grant, the National Institute of Justice reports more than 189,000 forensic DNA cases were analyzed in the most recent reporting year, which is over 15,000 cases per month nationwide. However, much work still remains to be done.

Through improved technology, crime laboratories have made tremendous progress towards increasing the amount of DNA evidence that can be processed. Forensic DNA is a victim of its own success—as more cases are solved using DNA, law enforcement has asked for even more DNA testing in more cases. Any decrease in this vital funding for forensic DNA analysis will lead to considerable strain on crime labs, as backlogs will grow to unprecedented levels, with impacts throughout the criminal justice system. Eliminating these backlogs helps to solve crimes, preventing criminals from walking the streets and reoffending.

Your subcommittee has long recognized the importance of the Debbie Smith DNA Backlog Grant, and the funding you have appropriated has aided thousands of cases and had tremendously positive effects on public safety. We appreciate the work you have done to provide resources for this critical program. For FY 2021, we strongly urge you to provide sufficient funding for this program, and to include language once again to ensure this funding is used for the stated purpose of DNA backlog reduction.

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We appreciate your commitment to solving and preventing violent crime and protecting victims of crime, and we thank you for your continued support for funding to maximize the use of DNA to solve crime.

Sincerely,

/s/ Sen. John Cornyn
/s/ Sen. Dianne Feinstein
/s/ Sen. Thom Tillis
/s/ Sen. Maria Cantwell
/s/ Sen. Tim Kaine
/s/ Sen. Martin Heinrich
/s/ Sen. Margaret Wood Hassan
/s/ Sen. Michael F. Bennet
/s/ Sen. Richard Blumenthal
/s/ Sen. Jacky Rosen
/s/ Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse
/s/ Sen. Gary C. Peters
/s/ Sen. Cory A. Booker
/s/ Sen. Mark R. Warner
/s/ Sen. Edward J. Markey
/s/ Sen. Tammy Duckworth
/s/ Sen. Christopher A. Coons
/s/ Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin
/s/ Sen. Tina Smith
/s/ Sen. Robert Menendez
/s/ Sen. Amy Klobuchar
/s/ Sen. Chris Van Hollen
/s/ Sen. Sherrod Brown
/s/ Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto
/s/ Sen. Debbie Stabenow
/s/ Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand
/s/ Sen. Kyrsten Sinema
/s/ Sen. Mazie Hirono
/s/ Sen. Jon Tester
/s/ Sen. Tammy Baldwin
/s/ Sen. Tom Udall
/s/ Sen. Jack Reed
/s/ Sen. Kamala D. Harris
/s/ Sen. Ron Wyden
/s/ Sen. Jeffrey A. Merkley
/s/ Sen. Elizabeth Warren
/s/ Sen. Richard J. Durbin