




THE STATE
of ALASKA
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FROM: David Kanaris 
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SUBJECT: Sexual Assault Kit Processing at the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory

In 2019 the Alaska Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory (ASCDL) made some changes to the way sexual assault kits were processed. These changes were in response to continued increases in submissions and legislative changes mandating a 12-month turnaround time for sexual assault kits. Prior to this time the ASCDL had either been using a bio-screening analyst and a DNA analyst or one DNA analyst who worked the entire case.

The ASCDL determined that to reduce the turnaround time we had to approach things a little differently. We realized that 60-80% of SA kits do not contain sufficient male DNA to continue beyond the quantification step and that by training new DNA analysts to report only quantification results we could reduce the training period by roughly 6 months. These cases that are effectively reported out as negative can be reported much quicker than previously as they require little to no interpretation. Cases that have potentially viable DNA are handed off to another analyst to interpret the findings and author the report. The ASCDL began employing this method in 2019. As a result, the lab has reduced the backlog by approximately 50% and reduced the turnaround time to 4-5 months without compromising the quality or integrity of evidence.

These changes were communicated at the DAs conference but due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the relative lack of trials we had not had feedback regarding this process. It has recently become clear that we need to reiterate the changes and to slightly modify the reports. Reports issued before April 2022 will list the laboratory analyst listed in the bench notes and the reporting analyst on the report. Going forward, the ASCDL will include the names of both analysts into the report and insert the following language: *'the reporting analyst has evaluated the work of the laboratory analyst, including the laboratory analyst's methodology, associated bench notes, and data obtained, and agrees with the opinions and/or conclusions reached by the laboratory analyst'*.

In other words, the DNA report may be authored by a different analyst, other than the one who performed the laboratory work. However, the reporting analyst will have reviewed the work of the laboratory analyst and the data produced and independently reached an opinion about the testing. In practicing this method, the reporting analyst, who is thoroughly trained in all facets of DNA analysis, should be the sole analyst to provide testimony. The analyst who performs the laboratory work is generally not able to testify to the content of the report. The Lab deems this approach to be the best alternative to continue to meet the mandated turnaround times specified by the legislature, while case submissions continue to increase and still meet the needs of the criminal justice system.

We believe these changes should make the reports more clear and transparent, which is the goal of everything we do at ASCDL.