

NYPD, state clear way for familial DNA testing

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NYPD and state officials have reached an agreement clearing the way for the use of familial DNA, an emerging forensic technology, in several open New York City rape and homicide investigations, officials said Friday.

The deal effectively breaks an administration logjam caused by a disagreement between the NYPD and officials at the state Division of Criminal Justice Services involving police concerns about confidentiality and possible legal indemnification, officials said.

NYPD Chief of Detectives Dermot Shea told Newsday that although the department had initially declined to sign a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to govern the submission of cases for special DNA

analysis, discussions with justice services led to an agreement addressing police concerns,

“Any time you work on a new process and have multiple agencies involved and necessary legal [concerns] . . . the most important thing is we can get it right,” Shea said of the new agreement, adding that privacy and law enforcement issues had to be balanced.

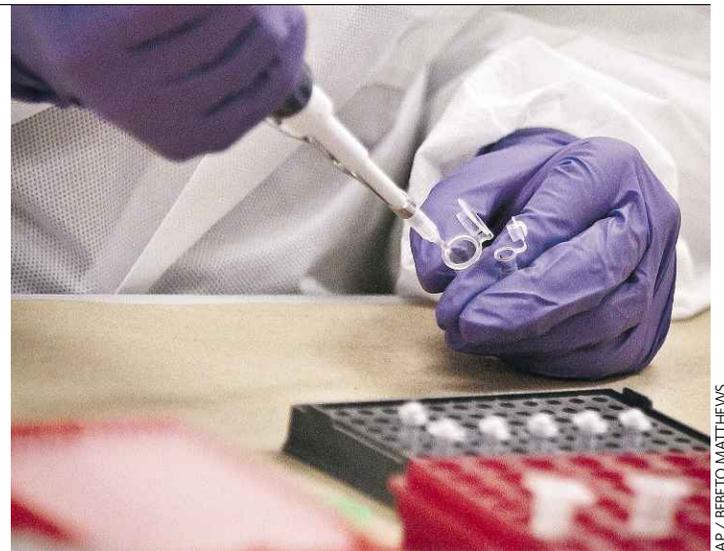
Shea said the NYPD signed the state-required MOU and eight city cases with unmatched crime DNA — six rapes and two homicides — will be processed using familial searching. Two of the rape cases are part of separate unsolved sex crime patterns, said Shea, adding that one of the homicides under investigation occurred in Brooklyn’s East Flatbush in 1997.

“We are pleased this issue has been resolved and will continue

to ensure all requests are handled quickly, efficiently and appropriately,” said DCJS spokeswoman Janine Kava on Friday. The NYPD signed eight separate MOUs — one for each case — on Friday, she said.

Familial searching is a two-step process in which unknown crime DNA is analyzed to determine, using probability analysis, if the genetic material may be related to that of someone already in state criminal databases. If any close matches are found, the DNA is subjected to further analysis to narrow down the list of possible relatives. Police may then interview the relatives in an effort to find a potential suspect and obtain evidence through other investigative means such as a search warrant or surveillance.

Familial searching is used in 11 states, including California and



AP / BEBETO MATTHEWS

A bone fragment sample is prepared for DNA testing in New York.

Colorado. California and other states have solved cases with familial DNA. So far, DCJS officials said they rejected four cases statewide because of inadequate DNA samples, and have completed one analysis that didn’t result in any match. Along with the eight NYPD cases, the state has nine cases waiting to use the analysis, officials said.

The science of familial searching gained traction in New York

after the slaying of Howard Beach jogger Karina Vetrano in 2016, when unknown DNA was found on her body but the case languished for six months. A suspect was ultimately arrested and charged using traditional investigative methods.

Shea hopes familial testing will provide families of victims some closure if cases are solved. In New York, state police laboratories do the required testing.

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