

Embargoed until April 30, 2021, 12 p.m. CST

Contact: Julia Lucivero

212.364.5371

[press@innocenceproject.org](mailto:press@innocenceproject.org)

**INNOCENCE  
PROJECT**

**ACLU**

## **Update Regarding DNA and Fingerprint Analyses in Ledell Lee Case**

*Ledell Lee was convicted of the murder of Debra Reese in 1995, maintained his innocence, and was executed on April 20, 2017. In January 2020, Mr. Lee's sister, Patricia Young, filed a petition to release the evidence for additional DNA testing and fingerprint analyses under the Arkansas Freedom of Information Act. The City of Jacksonville thereafter agreed to permit the testing under a joint order entered by the Court in February 2020.*

*This week, lawyers for the Lee family and the City of Jacksonville received two DNA testing reports on evidence submitted by the parties for testing.*

*The below statement is attributed to Nina Morrison, Senior Litigation Counsel at the Innocence Project, followed by a summary of the DNA testing results:*

We thank the City Attorney, City Council, and Mayor of Jacksonville for their cooperation in facilitating the DNA testing and fingerprint analysis that Mr. Lee sought to conduct prior to his execution. While the results obtained twenty-nine years after the evidence was collected proved to be incomplete and partial, it is notable that there are now new DNA profiles that were not available during the trial or post-conviction proceedings in Mr. Lee's case. These include a DNA profile from an unknown male who is not Ledell Lee that was found on the murder weapon (a wooden club) and a bloody shirt. The unknown male profile has been entered into the national DNA database, but no hits to known individuals were obtained.

While this phase of the litigation and court-ordered DNA testing is now concluded, the investigation into the case remains open due to the possibility of a future database 'hit' to the unknown male DNA or unknown fingerprints from the crime scene. We are hopeful that one or more of these forensic law enforcement databases will generate additional information in the future.

*The following may be attributed to lawyers from the Innocence Project and the American Civil Liberties Union, along with the law firms of Hogan Lovells and Quattlebaum, Grooms & Tull, who jointly represent Ms. Young.*

### **Summary of DNA Test Results**

On some items tested, no interpretable DNA was obtained, only trace amounts of DNA containing very partial profiles were obtained, and/or no DNA from anyone but the victim

Embargoed until April 30, 2021, 12 p.m. CST

herself was obtained (all potentially due to the age and condition of the samples). For items on which DNA from someone other than the victim was detected and interpretable, the results included the following:

- According to the report of Forensic Analytical Crime Lab (FACL), DNA from an unknown male (who is not Ledell Lee) was found on the handle of the apparent murder weapon: a bloody wooden billy club recovered from the victim's bedroom.
- DNA from an unknown male who is not Ledell Lee (referred to in the reports as "Unknown Male #1") was also found in a DNA mixture on a bloody white shirt wrapped around the murder weapon. It is unknown whether the DNA from this male was from blood or from other biological material (such as skin or sweat cells).
- The male DNA on both the club and the bloody fabric appears to be the same on both items.
- The DNA from "Unknown Male #1" is believed to be unique in the world's population.
- The DNA profile from Unknown Male #1 has been searched in the national DNA database. No "hits" (potential matches) to any persons or samples in the database were obtained. However, the DNA profile will now remain in the database and will be automatically compared to all new profiles from convicted persons, arrestees, or unsolved crimes that are entered in the future.
- Two slides containing hairs and hair fragments listed as being recovered from vacuum sweepings in the Reese bedroom were submitted to the University of North Texas Health Science Center (UNTHSC) for mitochondrial DNA testing. Mitochondrial DNA testing analyzes DNA shared by all individuals in a common maternal line, including distant relatives; it can be used to exclude known individuals as the source, but cannot be the basis for absolute identification or individualization.
- Mitochondrial DNA profiles suitable for interpretation or exclusion were obtained from 6 of the hairs/hair fragments on the two slides. Ledell Lee was excluded as the source of 5 of these 6 hairs. For one hair, Mr. Lee could not be excluded as a potential source.
- Because mitochondrial DNA profiles may be shared by thousands of individuals in a given population, they cannot be searched or entered in any law enforcement database (other than a statistical database to estimate their frequency in the population). However, the profile(s) obtained from the hairs in this case can be compared to known individuals, should any additional suspects be developed.

In addition, five interpretable fingerprints from the crime scene were examined by investigators in 1993 and it was determined that none of the prints came from Ledell Lee.

- Pursuant to the parties' February 2020 consent order, these five latent prints were searched in the national fingerprint database (AFIS/NGI). No "hits" (identifications to

Embargoed until April 30, 2021, 12 p.m. CST

known individuals) were obtained. Thus, the crime scene fingerprints all exclude Ledell Lee, but remain unidentified.

- The prints have not yet been searched in the Arkansas State fingerprint database, despite the parties' request that the Arkansas State Crime Laboratory conduct such a search. The Arkansas State AFIS system is believed to contain latent prints from additional individuals and/or crime scenes that are not included in the national AFIS/NGI database.
- If a "hit" in either the national AFIS/NGI system or the Arkansas State AFIS system is obtained in the future, the DNA from any individual(s) linked to the crime scene fingerprints may be compared to the Unknown Male DNA and the hair DNA referenced above.

###