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**WASHINGTON COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE SECURES GRANT
FUNDING TO INVESTIGATE COLD CASES**

HILLSBORO, Ore.- The Washington County District Attorney's Office was awarded \$470,000 in grant funding to investigate and prosecute violent crime cold cases that involve identified DNA associated with a possible suspect. The grant, "Prosecuting Cold Cases Using DNA," is funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance.

This office recently conducted a review of all major cold cases to identify their potential to be prosecuted with additional investigation. A cold case is defined as a case three or more years old that is not under active investigation. Of the 43 identified homicide cases dating back to 1968, at least 14 contain DNA evidence. Additionally, there are potentially hundreds of unsolved sexual assault cases over the decades that also contain DNA evidence. This office is confident many of these cases can be solved, the victims associated with them can receive the justice they deserve, the community at large can receive a sense of resolution and those who committed these crimes can finally be held responsible. This grant will allow additional resources and modern forensic tools to be used.

The grant funding will allow this office to hire one full-time investigator to pursue violent crime cold cases where suspect DNA has been identified. Additionally, this office would use a small portion of the funds to hire a forensic consultant. These new resources, combined with advances in DNA testing and related databases, will improve the chances of resolving these cases. Those hired for these two new positions will work with a prosecutor and victim advocate to form a Violent Crime Cold Case Multidisciplinary Team (MDT). The MDT would work together to solve and prosecute violent crime cold cases in Washington County and in partnership with existing resources, including the Washington County Major Crimes Team.

"Holding criminals accountable no matter how long they have hidden their crime is a fundamental component of justice. While these cases may be labeled as "cold cases," to the victims and their families, they are as just as real and important today as they were when the crime occurred many years ago. This office and Washington County law enforcement now have added tools to help provide some resolution and obtain justice," said District Attorney Kevin Barton.

This grant adds to the continued work of this office to resolve unsolved cases. For example, this office has worked in conjunction with the Washington County Sheriff's Office to test sexual assault kits and to collect DNA from offenders who are legally required to provide it.

Cold Case Spotlight

The 2001 murder of Loni Okaruru, a transgender woman, remains one of the 43 cold cases identified for renewed investigation under this grant funding. Ms. Okaruru was found murdered in Hillsboro, Oregon. This horrifying crime shook the community then and continues to cause pain today. Copied below is a news clipping regarding this case from 2001.

If you have any information on this murder, or any cold cases in Washington County, please contact your local law enforcement agency.

THE OREGONIAN ♦ THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2001

YOUR OPINION

Speak out against slaying of Loni Okaruru

Many who hear about the brutal murder of a cross-dresser in Washington County will be inclined to brush it off with thoughts that "she deserved it" or "who cares about those weirdos anyway?" These beliefs are perilous.

Loni Okaruru was beaten to death, her body dumped in a field near Hillsboro. Police believe she was picked up in the early hours of Sunday, Aug. 26, by a man looking for a woman.

That Okaruru was transgendered may have added fuel to a murderous rage. Okaruru's killing is a crime of hate directed both against transgendered people — cross-dressers, those who live as the other sex and those who have undergone sex-change operations — and against all women in Washington County. Homophobia can be a deadly weapon of sexism.

Many caring people are deeply committed to stopping crimes against transgendered persons. This was a crime against Okaruru's human right to express herself in this world as a woman — a courageous act for her to unfold her true nature. Her killing was a crime committed against all persons with a different sexual orientation or gender identity.

Cowardly haters commit these acts thinking that their morality — heterosexuality — is expressed and reinforced by their meanness and violence. All who deplore these acts must speak out loudly and longly. Our silence is equal to giving permission for these violent acts to continue.

The West County Coalition for Human Dignity and PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) are two local organizations that exist to help Washington County residents speak up against the haters. Okaruru's murder proves how necessary these groups are and how important it is to be organized in defense of our human rights.

There have been hate crimes before in Washington County. Reporting and recording crimes in this category has been limited. Officers may not have had the sensitivity or knowledge that a hate crime has been committed, and victims are often reluctant to come forward out of fear.

In Hillsboro last year, shots were fired into the home of a lesbian couple. This was clearly a hate crime. The fearful couple left their home that night and moved out of state.

Okaruru's murder was not the first hate crime in Washington County. It is just one more horrendous result of how children in this county and around the nation are taught by ignorant and bigoted adults.

We must work to stop this violence, to become informed and to teach our youth what we now know about the vast differences of others.

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Patricia Keeney of Forest Grove is spokeswoman for the West County Coalition for Human Dignity (503-720-0014) and a member of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (including Bisexual and Transgendered Persons), PFLAG Forest Grove (503-992-2293).

MY TURN POLICY

Do you have an issue you feel strongly about? An experience you want to share? "My Turn" is an opportunity to express yourself. Submissions should be about 800 words, or three typewritten, double-spaced pages. Write to: MetroWest Bureau, The Oregonian, 10100 S.W. Park Way, Portland, Ore. 97225, or send a fax to 503-203-1813; or send an e-mail to west@news.oregonian.com. Please include a telephone number where we can reach you during the day.



MY TURN
Patricia Keeney