



OREGON INNOCENCE PROJECT WELCOMES WORKGROUP ON OSP CRIME LAB; CALLS FOR THOROUGH AND INDEPENDENT REVIEW

September 25, 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PORTLAND, Ore. – Oregon Innocence Project welcomes the announcement by Governor Kate Brown that she has formed a workgroup to evaluate the practices and procedures of the Oregon State Police crime lab. The news follows the opening of an investigation into claims of evidence-tampering by a lab worker in Bend which may have affected around 1000 cases. It marks the third occasion in recent years when worrisome news has emerged about how the OSP crime labs operate.

Says Aliza Kaplan, Co-Founder of Oregon Innocence Project and Professor at Lewis & Clark Law School:

“We’re pleased Governor Brown has heeded our call for a review of the crime lab. As Governor Brown has acknowledged, Oregonians must be able to have faith in their justice system. We want to see trust restored by a thorough and independent investigation. The workgroup must carefully examine the internal operations of the OSP crime lab and produce a timeline and processes to ensure the problems we’ve seen don’t reoccur.”

The accusations of evidence-tampering by an analyst, Nika Larsen, are not the only occasion when issues with the OSP lab has emerged. Earlier this year, Oregon Innocence Project was called in to review cases by Deschutes County District Attorney, John Hummel, after concerns that another analyst over-reached in his conclusions on evidence in several cases. Meanwhile, in 2012 OSP closed its handwriting examination

unit following waning demand for the specialism and reports of alleged bias, sloppy work and dishonesty.

Says Steve Wax, Legal Director of Oregon Innocence Project:

“We’ve seen a host of problems and scandals at crime labs across the country in recent years. In the most serious cases, due process was found to have been violated and innocent people convicted. Oregon can learn from these costly and damaging scandals. We want to see a rigorous approach to forensics in our state that ensures evidence and analysis presented in our courts is always rooted in scientifically sound methods and principles. Most importantly, we want to see a crime lab that is subject to strong checks and operates transparently. Victims and defendants deserve no less.”

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