



OREGON INNOCENCE PROJECT DEMANDS INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION INTO SERIOUS PROBLEMS AT OSP CRIME LAB

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PORTLAND, Ore. – Oregon Innocence Project, an initiative of Oregon Justice Resource Center, is calling for an independent and transparent investigation into the shocking revelations about evidence tampering at Oregon State Police’s Forensic Laboratory in Bend.

News that up to a thousand cases are now in question following accusations that an analyst tampered with drug evidence is a matter of the utmost concern to victims as well as those prosecuted or convicted of crimes in our state. Cases of lab workers tampering with evidence have resulted in innocent people being convicted elsewhere and there is no reason to think this could not have happened in Oregon. This scandal proves the need for all forensic testing of evidence in our state to be carried out by an independent agency rather than by a division of Oregon State Police.

Lewis & Clark Law Professor and Oregon Innocence Project Co-Founder, Aliza Kaplan, says, “It’s unsurprising that Oregon is not immune from the string of crime lab and forensic scandals that have occurred in 19 other states across the country in the past decade. This unfortunate situation shows we need much more effective checks and balances on the work of our crime labs. Creating an independent testing agency would be an excellent start.”

Oregon Innocence Project has already been collaborating with Deschutes County District Attorney, John Hummel, on a review of several cases where there were concerns about the actions of an Oregon State Police Forensic Laboratory analyst. These cases are

unconnected to the current situation affecting the Bend crime lab but suggest a troubling pattern.

In Florida last year, an analyst was forced to resign from the Department of Law Enforcement crime lab after the discovery that he was tampering with evidence. Joseph Graves was switching prescription pain pills from evidence samples with over-the-counter medications. Graves was involved in processing 2,600 cases across 35 counties in Florida.

A year earlier, in Massachusetts, chemist Annie Dookhan was convicted and sentenced to three-to-five years in prison for falsifying drug tests to look more productive. The state was forced to spend millions addressing the fallout from her misdeeds. Thousands of people were directly affected by her crime.

It's vital that several steps are taken to restore faith in Oregon's justice system. First, a comprehensive and independent review of all the relevant cases should take place. Victims, defendants, and defense attorneys must be notified as a matter of urgency that their cases are affected. Independent re-testing of everything the analyst in question worked on must also happen. Oregon State Police labs' policies and procedures must be reviewed by an outside agency and robust systems put in place to prevent an outrage of this kind occurring again in future.

Oregon Innocence Project's Legal Director, Steve Wax, says, "As the only program within Oregon whose sole mission is to track and investigate claims of actual innocence, test DNA and other scientific evidence, and litigate when appropriate, we will be conducting our own review of every case. We have already reached out to OSP and requested a list of the cases. We are actively talking to stakeholders in this process. We look forward to collaborating with the Attorney General and District Attorneys to achieve our shared aim of ensuring that in each of these cases the truth comes out and justice is done."

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