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## **SEXUAL ASSAULT KIT BACKLOG REPORT COMPLETE**

### *Findings Reveal Consistent Adherence to Accepted Standard of Practice in Place at the Time*

MEMPHIS, TN – Former U.S. Attorney Veronica Coleman-Davis, hired by Mayor A C Wharton, Jr. to help review current policies and procedures for dealing with sexual assault kits (SAKs), completed her report this month and made recommendations for enhancing policies and procedures to ensure all kits are appropriately collected, maintained and tested going forward.

“My sincere thanks to Mrs. Coleman-Davis for her thorough examination of this issue,” said Mayor Wharton. “Her neutral approach and independent findings give me confidence that our plan to get all untested kits tested is on target and that we will be successful in our efforts to seek justice for the survivors.”

Coleman-Davis’ investigation included: Visiting the storage facilities where the untested kits are kept, interviewing various law enforcement and criminal justice leaders and personnel, advocates, forensic analysts and government officials, as well as reviewing documents that provide historical and current perspectives, and reviewing media coverage.

Regarding the finding of fault for the approximately 12,000 stored SAKs, the report reveals an adherence to nationally accepted standards at the time, rather than the failure of any one individual. Those standard practices have now evolved and are no longer considered best practice.

“This report does not affix blame because in my investigation I did not find that anyone involved willfully or maliciously conspired to deny due process,” Coleman-Davis said. “I discovered no malice or wanton disregard or conspiracies to ignore established policies, procedures or standard practices in place during this time. Rather, I found that there was a general and collective failure to understand the importance of DNA testing as was reflected in common practices in place locally and nationwide. Also, there is the unusual finding that the City retained evidence collected since the 1980s, unlike most jurisdictions which discarded theirs, and that there was a rigid adherence to accepted, standard practices of that time.”

The SAK report concludes that:

- The City is embarked on a multifaceted approach to ensure all kits are tested.
- Joyful Heart Foundation is providing expertise in assisting victims and engaging the community in addressing the issue, assisting in training law enforcement and advocates on victim notification and providing Heal the Healer Training.
- The Mayor’s Sexual Assault Cross Functional Team is ensuring that the work and reform efforts are coordinated and continually moving forward.

- Memphis Police Department and the District Attorney’s office have agreed to a one step process for submitting all SAKs for serology and DNA testing.
- SAKs currently stored at Old Allen Station and 201 Poplar will be moved to the Harvester site after a \$1 million expansion is complete.
- The caseloads are already high and burn out is and will be a challenge in addressing the untested kits. Funding will be needed to increase staffing.
- There are efforts to raise the estimated \$5 million to 6 million needed to fund the entire effort, with \$2 million already secured.

“It is clear that there is a concerted effort to reduce the backlog to zero and to make certain that policies and procedures are in place to ensure we will never find ourselves in this position again,” Coleman-Davis’ report concludes.

The City of Memphis Sexual Assault (SAK) Backlog report is attached to this email and available online at [www.memphistn.gov](http://www.memphistn.gov).

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