

NEWSLETTER

The DNA Expansion Project 2008

Groundbreaking changes are taking place in Government that will underpin the expansion of SA's National DNA Database



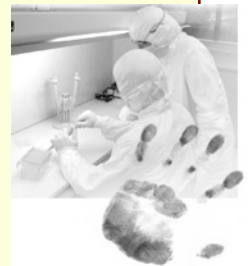
It was whilst drafting this newsletter, that I received a call from the Department of Justice, advising me that the new DNA Bill had been adopted by Cabinet. I sat there, alone, and screamed out loud, as this was but a distant vision 4 years ago. I wonder how many of you reading this newsletter, have heard me talking about the critical importance of changing legislation in SA to accommodate a National DNA Database? I hope that you too scream out loud when you read this news, as without this fundamental change in legislation, the future potential of a National DNA Database will remain a dream. It is a wonderful way to end an otherwise tumultuous year - the adoption of the new Bill provides hope for the New Year as it paves the way towards crime resolution, detection and prevention. But the adoption of the Bill now requires public submissions, and **lots** of them, commenting on

the Bill - and it is here that each one of you reading this newsletter, must take a stand and make the time to email your submissions to Parliament % LiLouw@justice.gov.za as to why you think it is fundamental that this law is passed in SA. Your email will not be one in a string of unread emails that circulates endlessly, crying out for a change. Your email WILL EFFECT that change, and the more people you appeal to and ask to comment on the Bill, the more chance we have of ensuring that the Bill is passed by Parliament in February 2009. A copy of the Bill can be accessed on www.pmg.org.za If ever there was a time to tangibly make a difference in SA, it is now. Please - **make yourself heard.**

DNA Legislation a Reality

“Cabinet has approved the introduction of the Criminal Law (Forensic Procedures) Amendment Bill, 2008, into Parliament. The Bill forms part of the overhaul of the criminal justice system and will provide an essential mechanism to enhance the investigation of crime. The Bill aims to strengthen two pivotal aspects of our forensic crime fighting capacity, namely the collection, storage and use of fingerprinting and DNA evidence. A copy of the Bill can be accessed on www.pmg.org.za All interested parties are invited to submit their comment on the Bill to the Dept. of Justice and Constitutional Development % LiLouw@justice.gov.za , which comments will be submitted to the Committees of Parliament dealing with the legislation. In view of the urgent need for this legislation it is envisaged that Parliament will be processing the Bill at the beginning of the 2009 session.”

DoJ, Dec '08



SO WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE NEW DNA BILL?

For the first time, the law will allow for DNA profiles to be uplifted from all convicted offenders *retrospectively*. It will also allow Police Officers (as opposed to registered Medical Practitioners), to uplift a DNA profile from suspects who have been arrested, via a buccal (saliva) swab or finger prick, for entry onto the DNA Database. The Bill officially creates a National DNA Database and allows for speculative searching for criminal intelligence purposes only. The enactment of this new law will serve as a deterrent for criminals and address the issues of accountability, which

pose a huge issue in SA in respect of repeat crimes being committed by the same person. The adoption of the new DNA Bill will result in a capacity issue in respect of our current FSLs being able to process these additional samples, and in order to accelerate the analysis of convicted offender and suspect samples, it will be necessary to consider using the services of private DNA Labs. The CJR team have henceforth agreed to look into the possibility of allowing vendor labs to assist the State Labs with processing reference samples for entry onto the database, which too, will be addressed in the new Bill.

THE FORENSIC SCIENCE SERVICES (UK) VISIT SA

In February 2008, the DNA Project, through the generous sponsorship of the Change a Life Mike Thomson Trust, sponsored the Forensic Science Services (“The FSS”) visit to SA to conduct a Diagnostic Review of the Forensic Science Lab in Pretoria. The purpose of the visit was to enable the FSS to better understand the current situation in SA and the vision of the future of forensic DNA in SA. Issues such as scene of crime requirements, legislative impact, technical processes, procedures and techniques currently used within the FSL, were explored. Currently, DNA analysis to support the South African Police Service (SAPS) is provided by 2 laboratories, Pretoria and Western Cape. The Pretoria unit is the largest and houses the National DNA Database. The FSS were requested to undertake a review of the Pretoria Forensic Science Lab (FSL), Biology Unit (BU) to establish if anything could be done to improve the efficiency and hence capacity of the DNA analytical process; reduce the existing backlog; improve the contribution of the unit to the detection and conviction of offenders and make recommendations for future development and expansion of the DNA Database. The outcome of the Diagnostic Review by the FSS was a comprehensive findings report with recommendations

to support the enhancement of DNA processing in SA including a number of proposed solutions from the FSS to meet those recommendations. This report was submitted to the FSL following a presentation of the above findings to the FSL in Pretoria, in July 2008.



FORENSIC ANALYST DEGREE & DNA AWARENESS TRAINING : KEY FACTORS

Along with the DNA Bill, the Criminal Justice Review team has included the DNA Project in its Task Team to develop a Postgraduate Forensic Analyst

(“FA”) Course. The DNA Project, through the generous efforts of The Change a Life-Mike Thomson Trust, Leigh Matthews Trust, peresys and the Open Society Foundation of SA, will fund the development of learning materials for the first ever Post Graduate FA Degree in SA. Dr Carolyn Hancock, a Director of the DNA Project, is spearheading this vital project which process will be completed during 2009. Qiagen and Applied BioSystems, have in addition donated a QIA Cube, Genetic Analyser (3130) and Sequencer (7900) for use by one Service Provider, which means

that the FA Honours course may begin at at least one Service Provider in 2010. The DNA Project is, in addition, in the process of completing the final proposal for the construction of a DNA Awareness Forensic Training Bus i.e. a mobile training facility, which will allow for DNA Awareness Training throughout SA. We hope to raise funds in 2009 to sponsor the roll out of at least 3 of these mobile training busses, which will ensure that First Attending Officers at a crime scene are trained to improve their collection rates of DNA at crime scenes.



THANK YOU

In closing, we thank you all again for your incredible support, which makes the work we do possible. The Western Cape Forensic Lab told us last week that they have reported a 40% increase in productivity at their Lab since the DNA Project began donating equipment to them - they attribute the reported rise in performance, however, not to the additional DNA equipment donated, but to the raise in the staffs’ morale - the fact that the public, represented by the DNA Project, appreciated and took an interest in the work that they do.

Let us carry that spirit through to 2009, where we hope to see you all, in full force, in support of the changes that are taking place in this, our, South Africa. Let us , the majority, take back from the criminal minority, what is rightfully ours.

Best Regards,

Vanessa Lynch

