

NEWS RELEASE

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Developments in microscopic hair analysis lead to possible retrial

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – As a result of recent developments concerning testimony on microscopic hair comparisons by analysts trained by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the District Attorney's Office has consented to a motion that grants a new trial to a defendant who was convicted by a Mecklenburg County jury in 1991. The criminal justice system is constantly evolving with advances in science, and any time the DA's Office is made aware of cases in which inappropriate scientific testimony contributed to a conviction, prosecutors have an obligation to act.

At issue in this case is testimony about the analysis of hair microscopy evidence. At the time of the trial, which occurred under a previous administration, the courts had allowed this testimony as admissible. However, in recent years, there have been an increasing number of experts who found that some testimony – including claims that a hair sample could be associated with a specific person or opinions that would lead a jury to believe that a valid statistical weight could be assigned to the probability of a hair matching a particular person – went beyond the limits of science. Federal authorities have determined that those conclusions should not have been made before a jury.

During Timothy Scott Bridges' 1991 trial, a Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department crime laboratory analyst, who received his training in microscopic hair analysis from the FBI, testified about hair that was collected as evidence during the investigation. After the jury's guilty verdict, Mr. Bridges was sentenced to life in prison with the possibility of parole after 20 years.

In the years that followed Mr. Bridges' conviction, he appealed the verdict to the N.C. Court of Appeals and the N.C. Supreme Court, arguing that the hair analysis was improperly allowed as evidence at trial. These appellate courts ultimately found that the court had erred in allowing some of the testimony but that the error was not prejudicial to the defendant.

Then, in 2012, the [FBI announced that the hair analysis testimony presented by FBI analysts and FBI-trained analysts overstated the evidentiary value of such evidence](#). As a result, the FBI is reviewing all cases that involved hair analysis done by the bureau's analysts and is contacting defense attorneys in those cases to alert them of the issue.

Following the FBI's announcement, Mr. Bridges filed a motion for appropriate relief, asking for a new trial. The DA's Office reviewed the case and found that the analyst's testimony contained information that the FBI now says would constitute improper testimony. The DA's Office consented to Mr. Bridges' motion, and a judge granted his request. Before determining

how to move forward with the case, the DA's Office and CMPD are working to ascertain whether any witnesses are still available and what examination, if any, can be done on any remaining evidence. The victim in this case is now deceased. The DA's Office went to great lengths to locate relatives of the victim, and the office has notified them of the situation. Because this is now a pending case, prosecutors' ethical obligations prevent the DA's Office from making any further comment at this time.

At this time, the DA's Office is unaware of any other Mecklenburg County convictions in which similar issues may exist, and the office has not been contacted about any other such cases.

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