

Committee: Judicial Proceedings
Testimony on: HB0240 - Criminal Procedure – Forensic Genetic Genealogical DNA Analysis,
Searching, Regulation, and Oversight
Submitting: James V. Bartlett, Jr., PE
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: February 23, 2021

Dear Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for allowing my testimony today in support of HB0240. I have been a genealogist since 1974, and a genetic genealogist since 2002. I have given presentations on genetic genealogy to local and international organizations for 17 years. I authored Chapter 1 (Lessons Learned from Triangulating a Genome) in the book: “Advanced Genetic Genealogy: Techniques and Case Studies”, Editor Debbie Parker Wayne 2019; and I have an autosomal DNA blog: www.segmentology.org. The genetic genealogy community relies on our ability to get tested through Direct-to-Consumer testing companies and to compare our results within those companies as well as through 3rd party companies. Many of us have benefited from the shared DNA data. This includes “regular” genealogists as well as individuals seeking to identify their biological parent(s) and others who are mainly interested in their genetic admixture (aka ethnicity, population groups or heritage).

The Need for Informed Consent

The case of the “Golden State Killer” being identified with the help of genetic genealogy and a public database caused quite a stir among genetic genealogists. As more and more cases are “solved” using genetic genealogy tools, our concerns have centered around informed consent. This bill strongly addresses that concern.

Creating a Safe Environment for Genetic Genealogy

In general, genetic genealogists recognize the value of forensic genetics to Law Enforcement, and the techniques we have developed to identify familial relationships based on shared DNA. However, our concern is that this might be misused. Limiting Law Enforcement’s use of forensic genetics to the most serious crimes, and only after all other avenues of investigation have been followed, is welcomed. Many genetic genealogists, myself included, have opted into Law Enforcement use (for selected serious crimes) at the popular GEDmatch site. We want to continue to voluntarily compare our DNA with others who have consented to sharing; and at the same time feel comfortable that use by Law Enforcement is regulated to very serious crimes. This bill provides that regulation.

Use in Rape Cases

It is hoped that Forensic Genetics can also be used to reduce the backlog of rape kits.

Respectfully submitted,
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