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# PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY POLICE DEPARTMENT

*FIRST TO SERVE SINCE 1931*

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MALIK AZIZ  
CHIEF OF POLICE

Chairman and members of the Committee, I am 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Gregory McDonald of the Prince George's County Police Department. On behalf of Chief Malik Aziz, we are grateful for the opportunity to address you today to express our deep concern with the negative impact this bill will have on the field of Forensic Genetic Genealogy in Maryland. I'd also like to publicly thank the family of Matthew Alan Mickens-Murrey whose tragic murder was solved thanks to Forensic Genetic Genealogy.

I have been a police officer for thirty-two years, a criminal investigator for the past twenty-eight years, and assigned to the Homicide Unit for the past twenty-four years. Since 2015, I have overseen the Cold Case Homicide Unit. Our team has fully embraced this new investigative tool,

particularly considering a Department of Justice grant that was awarded to the Prince George's County State's Attorney's Office. Forensic Genetic Genealogy is unquestionably one of the most significant advancements to recently impact law enforcement. It is an investigative tool that will continue to produce successful outcomes in criminal investigations that would otherwise remain unsolved. Forensic Genetic Genealogy produces leads which law enforcement can then use to identify unknown suspects. The method can also assist in identifying unidentified human remains and the remains of homicide victims.

Please allow me to now share with you the role Forensic Genetic Genealogy played in solving the murder of Matthew Mickens-Murrey, a young man found stabbed to death in his apartment in Cheverly on May 30, 2017. Family

members called police after Matthew failed to report for work as a security guard that day. When police responded to his apartment, they found Matthew lying face down in his living room, suffering from stab wounds.

Crime Scene Investigators collected evidence from the scene which included a bloody fingerprint that did not belong to the victim. It was clear the murderer was injured at some point while committing the brutal crime. A DNA profile of the bloody fingerprint was submitted to both the national fingerprint and DNA data bases maintained by the FBI - but no match was obtained.

After an extensive investigation failed to develop any promising leads, the case went cold for several years. Finally, in 2019, the unidentified blood evidence was submitted to a private

laboratory to develop a profile for Forensic Genetic Genealogy. Forensic Genetic Genealogy looks at more than half a million single nucleotide variations to DNA (called single nucleotide polymorphism, or SNP). The SNPs can identify family traits from sections of the DNA recovered at a crime scene sample to distant relatives.

In Matthew's case, the private laboratory developed a profile and then work building the family tree began. This ultimately led to a possible suspect in Charles County, but more police investigation was needed. Further investigation indicated the potential suspect, Brandon Biagas, suffered a serious injury the night of the murder. He sought medical treatment at a hospital in Charles County. When questioned by a deputy sheriff at the hospital, Mr. Biagas gave inconsistent and contradictory versions of how he

injured his hand, which he claimed took place during the purchase of marijuana at a park in Waldorf. The deputies collected a knife and bloody clothing from his vehicle pursuant to a court-ordered search and seizure warrant. The evidence the Charles County Sheriff's Office collected was not submitted to CODIS because no qualifying crime was identified to justify a submission. Years after the murder, and thanks to the lead provided by the forensic genetic genealogy process, Brandon Biagas was identified as the donor of the bloody fingerprint found in Matthew's apartment. He ultimately pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to a lengthy prison sentence.

Were this bill before you today become law as it's now written, it would undoubtedly jeopardize leads developed from Forensic Genetic

Genealogy that would aid law enforcement in resolving unsolved homicides in our state. If Forensic Genetic Genealogy is lost, any hopes of resolving unsolved homicides or identifying unidentified human remains will significantly diminish. There are thousands of unidentified DNA profiles from Maryland crime scenes that have been submitted to the national DNA data base (CODIS), and after decades, no suspect match has been developed. If leads developed by Forensic Genetic Genealogy are lost, investigators will have to revert to relying on often unreliable jailhouse snitches, eyewitness identifications, and suspect confessions.

Let me close by saying that law enforcement cannot afford to lose access to this groundbreaking investigative technique, which will only continue to improve and advance

criminal investigations. This would be a disservice to crime victims, their families, and the citizens of Maryland.

I respectfully ask you to join us in our opposition and return an unfavorable report on HB 807.