

DNA Lab Is Under Construction In Wake County

By Administrator

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Construction is under way on a new DNA laboratory within the Raleigh/Wake City-County Bureau of Identification (CCBI). The lab will be the first local government DNA lab in the Triangle and the second facility of its kind in North Carolina. “Our criminal justice system depends on having timely, reliable information,” said Wake County Board of Commissioners Chair Matt Calabria. “By adding this state-of-the-art lab to its facility, CCBI will be able to quickly and accurately analyze the DNA evidence its crime scene investigators find in the field, saving precious time and moving cases forward faster.”

Currently, CCBI sends DNA evidence to the North Carolina State Crime Lab for analysis. Case submissions there have jumped 62% over the past five years.

When CCBI’s new lab opens, it will halt that practice and begin analyzing DNA evidence from Wake County cases in its own 950 square-foot facility. This change will free up resources at the state lab, enabling them to focus on evidence from other municipalities in the queue. This move will benefit both residents in Wake County and those in counties statewide.

From an Idea to Reality

The idea to create the DNA lab came from CCBI Director Sam Pennica. And, interestingly, COVID-19 safety protocols ended up providing the space he needed to house the facility.

During quarantine, CCBI investigators worked remotely from their homes and vehicles instead of coming into the office to reduce the risk of contracting the virus. The experience proved the remote working model was effective – and even preferred – by the investigators and should be implemented permanently.

The switch freed up the space needed to construct the DNA lab in CCBI’s current location, bringing Pennica’s idea to fruition.

“It’s exciting to be part of a project that we know will do so much good for our community,” said Director Pennica. “DNA testing has proven to be extremely accurate and has advanced to become an important 21st century forensic testing technique.”

Funding the Project

Wake County has approved \$360,000 for construction of the lab, which comes from court ordered lab fees. The only cost to local taxpayers moving forward will be the salaries of the three technicians the lab will employ.

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Representatives Deborah Ross (NC-02) and David Price (NC-04) secured \$500,000 in funding in the House Appropriations package for the scientific equipment for the DNA lab. CCBI will receive this federal funding if the legislation passes the House, Senate and is signed into law by President Biden.

Alignment with Board Goals

The new lab aligns with two of the Wake County Board of Commissioners' 2021 goals in the area of public safety:

- Providing high quality and sustainable public safety services to meet the community's current and future needs; and
- Addressing equity in the criminal justice system.

Adding DNA testing to the services already offered by CCBI also aligns with its chartering mandate to improve the enforcement of criminal laws in Wake County. In addition, it supports the NC Survivor Act, which requires the bureau to protect the residents of Wake County and North Carolina from criminal acts and wrongful judicial convictions.

Construction on the lab began Monday, Nov. 8, and is projected to open in late 2022 or early 2023.