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**DA's Investigation to Bring Full Exoneration Thursday in 1987 Conviction**

Houston, Tx – Harris County District Attorney Patricia Lykos announced Wednesday that an investigation by the District Attorney's Office and advanced forensic testing has led to a request for full exoneration of a man previously imprisoned 17 years on convictions for kidnapping and sexually assaulting a girl in 1987.

Based on the test results, the District Attorney's Office will present new dismissal orders on Thursday morning (March 3) to Judge Belinda Hill of the 230<sup>th</sup> District Court. These requested orders state that George Rodriguez, 50, is actually innocent of the charges.

DNA analysis on the only remaining evidence – hairs collected during the original sexual assault examination – also verifies the true identities of the two men who actually committed the crimes.

“When this scientific inquiry began, there was no legal requirement or mandate for any further work to be done by our Office, because the case had been dismissed,” Lykos said. “Instead, we acted on the most important obligation of all – to see that the truth emerges, and that justice is done. Today, we can state that an innocent man has been vindicated.”

Rodriguez was convicted in 1987 of aggravated sexual assault and aggravated kidnapping and sentenced to 60 years in prison. He was freed in 2004, when the verdict was overturned because of an appellate ruling that faulty scientific evidence had been introduced at his trial. Charges were ultimately dismissed, in part because of prosecutors' concerns about the victim having to testify again at trial. However, the underlying issue of his innocence remained unresolved until now.

In the years after his release, Rodriguez was rebuffed in his requests for a pardon. In 2009, District Attorney Lykos took office and created the Post Conviction Review Section to conduct reviews of credible claims of innocence.

Lykos received Rodriguez's application for a pardon and directed her Post Conviction Review team to look into his claims. She agreed with the recommendations of Assistant District Attorneys Baldwin Chin and Alicia O'Neill to submit the only remaining evidence for advanced DNA testing.

Rodriguez had been identified by the victim as one of two men who abducted her and sexually assaulted her at a house in the Denver Harbor area. The investigation and the serological testing and hair comparisons by the Houston Police Department Crime Laboratory resulted in the arrest of Rodriguez. The resident of the house, Manuel Beltran, now 50 years old, was also convicted.

In 2004, forensic testing established that the trial testimony regarding blood typing tests and visual hair comparisons conducted by HPD Crime Lab personnel was erroneous. By the time the DA's Post Conviction Review Section began its work, the only evidence left were slides containing several hairs collected from the victim.

Research by the Post Conviction Review Section revealed that a forensic lab in Richmond, California, had developed state-of-the-art DNA extraction techniques that could detect male DNA in cellular debris attached to strands of hair collected from female victims.

Testing was ordered. On Feb. 22, the final DNA testing report was issued. It conclusively excluded Rodriguez as one of the attackers.

The report confirmed that Beltran, now serving a 60-year prison term for this offense, had assaulted the girl. Test results also positively identified Isidro Yanez, an alternative suspect in this case, as the second assailant. Yanez is now deceased.

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