

INTEGRITY

The Center for Integrity in Forensic Sciences Newsletter



Cases

Melissa Lucio was scheduled to be executed on April 27th, 2022. After many weeks of spreading awareness and thousands backing her innocence the Texas Criminal Court of Appeals granted her a stay of execution and remanded for the next steps in fighting for her innocence.

Melissa was convicted in the death of her 2-year-old daughter. The child fell down the stairs and died two days later from her injuries.

Melissa was interrogated for five hours right after the death of her daughter. She finally said what her interrogators wanted- "I guess I did it". Likely contributing to this false confession was the fact that Melissa was a survivor of sexual assault and domestic violence, making her particularly vulnerable to police coercion, especially by men.

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EVERY DONATION BRINGS US THAT MUCH CLOSER TO A FAIR LEGAL SYSTEM.

DONATE

Amicus Briefs

Georgia- Danyel Smith was convicted of killing his infant son in 2003. It was said that he shook his son to death. At his trial, Danyel testified: "If I knew what happened to Chandler I would tell the jury, if I shook my son, I would say I shook my son. But I didn't do that."

In April, CIFS filed an amicus brief on his behalf. Medical diagnostics have advanced since 2002, when his son tragically died. We now know that the death was likely caused by complications from a premature birth and ensuing seizures.



The Gwinnett County courts rejected a new trial for Daynel in March after new science was brought forward. This amicus brief now argues the numerous reasons a new trial should have been warranted.

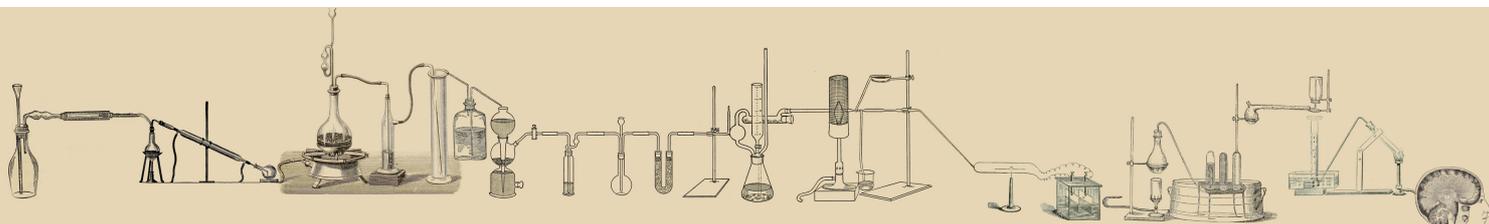
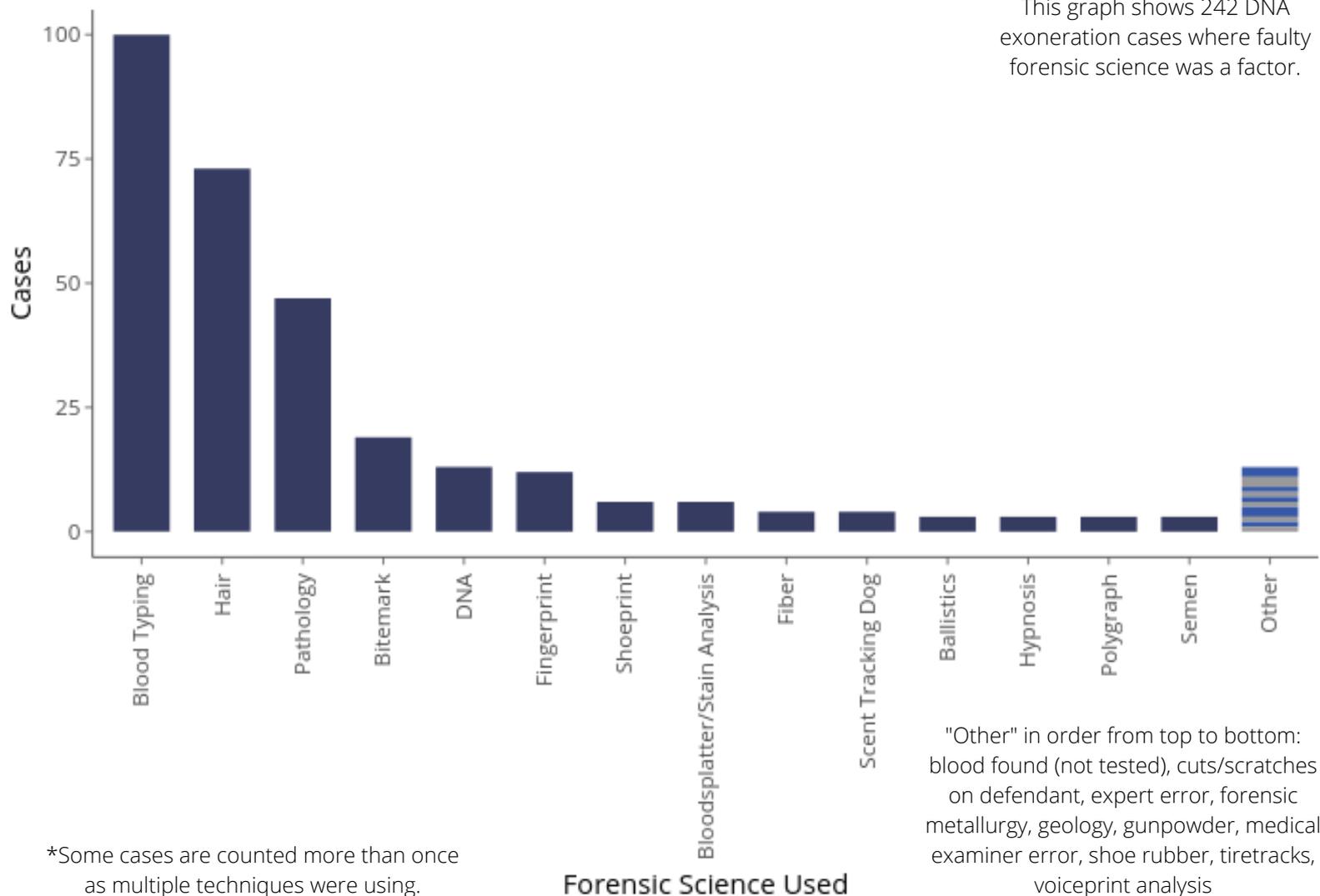
Science in the News

International DNA Day was April 25th and to show the importance of DNA in the legal system, we collected data on the 249 wrongful conviction cases where faulty forensic science was at issue and advanced DNA testing later proved innocence.

DNA has been a pivotal part of exposing faulty forensic sciences. Advancements in DNA testing have allowed us to test evidence from years ago that contradicts faulty interpretations of that time. Take hair comparison, for example: many convictions relied on the comparison of hairs from a crime scene and hairs of a suspect. If an expert testified to the similarities or "match" between the hairs, that often gave juries the the information they needed to convict. But advances in DNA testing have snow that these interpretations are often wrong. DNA testing can now sometimes exonerate individuals previously wrongfully convicted based on hair comparison.

This has happened with numerous forensic science techniques over the years. Using data from the National Registry of Exonerations, we looked at each DNA case to find the misleading or faulty forensic science(s) used in the original conviction. The graph below shows the causes we found. What's alarming is that many of these techniques are still being used today.

This graph shows 242 DNA exoneration cases where faulty forensic science was a factor.



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In light of International DNA Day, it seems appropriate to reflect on the ways in which DNA has driven the criminal legal reform movement. While DNA can be powerful new evidence of innocence, very few cases involve DNA. DNA's real power in this movement has been to show error in other disciplines and case types. For instance, until the advent of DNA evidence, it was widely believed that people did not confess to crimes they did not commit and that eyewitnesses didn't err when identifying perpetrators of crime. Now we know that both can happen, implicating the innocent.

DNA has been particularly useful in showing how real science can help solve crimes--and how bad science can hinder that effort. DNA evidence is the only evidence that can be reliably linked to an alleged perpetrator. It isn't perfect, but it reflects a significant improvement over other forensic science disciplines. In this way, even when a case does not involve DNA evidence, the lessons learned from analyzing DNA can help prevent miscarriages of justice. We hope you'll stand with CIFS in applying the lessons learned from the DNA revolution to advocacy for real science in courtrooms.