

WASHINGTON, Monday, October 2 - The House today passed legislation co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-AL) to help states like Alabama clear away mounting backlogs of unprocessed DNA evidence now waiting in deep-freeze storage.

"DNA evidence convicts the guilty and exonerates the innocent. But because our crime labs are so woefully underfunded, there is a huge delay in getting this crucial evidence tested. Justice delayed is justice denied so we've got to solve this problem right away," said Bachus.

The bill authorizes \$170 million to help state authorities clear backlogs of DNA samples now in storage.

A recent national survey found that eight out of 10 crime labs have experienced a growth in their caseloads exceeding their growth in budget or staff. The problem is particularly acute in Alabama, where it can take almost two years to process DNA samples.

"In Alabama, crime victims and their families often have to wait two years or more to get justice and those who are falsely charged have to wait that long to finally be absolved of a crime," said Bachus. "The emotional, physical and financial toll this takes is incalculable. There are a lot of problems money can't fix. This is not one of them.

"This extra funding can be especially helpful to Alabama. It will allow the Department of Forensic Sciences to pay for more investigators, new equipment and laboratory improvements that will help speed up DNA testing," Bachus said.

Bachus is also a co-sponsor of other legislation that provides \$768 million over six years to upgrade state crime labs and reduce the backlog of DNA evidence. Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) has introduced the bill in the Senate.

Examples of cases in Alabama follow on the next page

Alabama Cases Involving Backlog of DNA Testing

Information provided by Dr. J.C. Upshaw Downs,
Chief Medical Examiner of Alabama

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Hoover - One Year Wait So Far

The family of a murder victim and his alleged murderer have been waiting a year for testing of DNA evidence. A 32-year-old Hoover resident was stabbed to death on Sept. 26, 1999. A suspect in the case was arrested one week later and has been held in the Tuscaloosa County jail ever since.

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Ozark - One Year Wait So Far

In Ozark, Ala, the families of two teenage girls who were murdered have waited one year for DNA analysis so far. The evidence found at the crime scene will probably prove who their murderer is, but the lab in Montgomery which runs evidence from this part of the state has a 670 case backlog right now.

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Decatur - One Year, Six Month Wait So Far

A woman was raped and stabbed to death in her home. It took one year for the DNA evidence to be analyzed, but the test results were not 100% conclusive. A second test on a hair sample has been ordered, however the lab in Alabama does not have the capability to perform this test so the sample has been sent to the FBI.

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Roanoke - Six Month Wait So Far

A 14-year-old girl was murdered. The community was told it would be a minimum of at least six months before they could get a DNA test of the evidence, due to the backlog. This community decided they could not live that long with a killer in their midst, so they raised \$6,000 on their own to send the evidence out to a private lab. Unfortunately, the lab was not as experienced as the state forensic lab in these kinds of cases and progress in the case has been seriously delayed.