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NEWS RELEASE



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Ventura County District Attorney's Office Identifies Wrongful Conviction Through Sexual Assault Kit Initiative & Conviction Integrity Review

VENTURA, Calif. – District Attorney Erik Nasarenko announced today that a review conducted by the Ventura County Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (VCSAKI) and the District Attorney's Office Conviction Integrity Unit has determined that a man convicted more than 40 years ago of a 1982 rape in unincorporated Simi Valley was wrongfully convicted.

Recent DNA testing excluded the wrongfully convicted man, Richard Luna, as the individual responsible for the crime. The results identified a different individual whose DNA matched evidence collected from the victim's sexual assault kit.

The victim's sexual assault kit was tested as part of the Ventura County Sexual Assault Kit Initiative's ongoing review of previously untested kits. Testing overseen by the Ventura County Sheriff's Forensic Services Bureau led to the development of an offender DNA profile that was later matched in the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) to a different person. Unfortunately, the statute of limitations prevents the filing of charges against the newly identified suspect in this decades-old case.

"While we can't undo the past, we can use the power of DNA technology to exonerate the wrongfully convicted," said District Attorney Nasarenko. "This case underscores our responsibility as prosecutors to examine the integrity of our convictions and seek justice on behalf of those who served time for crimes they never committed."

In 1983, a jury convicted Luna of the sexual assault. After his conviction, Luna was sentenced to six years in state prison. The recent forensic results definitively exclude him as a contributor to the biological evidence in the case. The District Attorney's Office notified Luna, the victim, and the Ventura County Public Defender's Office of these findings. Today, the court approved the People's motion to vacate the conviction and found Mr. Luna factually innocent.

This is the first case in Ventura County in which the Conviction Integrity Unit, working collaboratively with VCSAKI, has identified a wrongful conviction through post-conviction DNA testing. In VCSAKI's testing of untested sexual assault kits, nearly two dozen kits have confirmed the identity of the suspect convicted.

The Ventura County District Attorney's Office established its Conviction Integrity Unit to review credible claims of factual innocence. While the appellate process safeguards the rights of the accused, the Conviction Integrity Unit provides an additional layer of review to identify and correct wrongful convictions.

VCSAKI is a countywide effort that was launched in 2022 to test every sexual assault kit for the presence of DNA and investigate unsolved cases. The initiative is funded by grants awarded by the United States Department of Justice along with funding from the County of Ventura. More information on VCSAKI can be found at saki.venturacounty.gov, including regularly updated data on the status of sexual assault kit testing. Victims of past sexual assaults can also utilize this website to access support services including free counseling in some instances, or to get assistance in determining the status of their sexual assault kit.