

Senate Committee on Ways and Means
March 6, 2025

Dear Chairman Billinger and Members of the Committee:

My name is Brendan Belair, Chief Strategy Officer of Othram Inc, and I write today to encourage support for forensic genetic genealogy (FGG) testing as you consider public safety budgets.

Background

For decades, forensic DNA testing has relied on short tandem repeat (STR) analysis, the method that underpins the CODIS system. While this approach has been useful for identifying individuals already in the database, its limitations are substantial. STR testing requires higher-quality and larger quantities of DNA than are often available in forensic cases. Moreover, CODIS was never designed to address the needs of UHR investigations, as most unidentified remains are not convicted criminals and therefore are not in the National DNA database known as CODIS. For older cases, where no close relatives can be found, STR testing is even less effective, making it nearly impossible to confirm an identity.

Othram technology overcomes all these challenges with Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing® (FGGS®). This transformative technology uses massively parallel sequencing to analyze hundreds of thousands of DNA markers (instead of the 20 in CODIS profiles), enabling the creation of detailed DNA profiles from degraded or minimal samples. Unlike traditional methods, FGGS® can identify distant relatives, making it possible to uncover connections that were previously undetectable. With Othram's technology, anyone can be identified—regardless of whether they or a close relative are in the database, the circumstances of the case, where the crime occurred, or even how long ago it happened.

Scope of the Problem in Kansas

- According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Report, Kansas has 2,141 unsolved homicides in Kansas.
- The National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), operated by the Department of Justice (DOJ), lists 25 unidentified human remains cases in Kansas.
- According to the *Kansas Sexual Assault Kit Initiative Final Report* published by the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, there are approximately **220 unsolved sexual assault cases** from the Kansas SAKI project.

Anticipated Impacts:

- Aid in resolving previously unsolvable cold cases
- Assist in the identification of criminals
- Seek justice for previously unidentified victims
- Help exonerate wrongly accused suspects
- Bring closure for the victims' loved ones
- And make Kansas communities safer

Previous Successes in Kansas

Kansas law enforcement has leveraged Othram's technology in the following cases:

- The Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office positively identified a 1994 homicide victim as Harold "James" Crawford¹. *(November 2023)*
- The Lyon County Sheriff's Office positively identified a 2017 John Doe as Randy Clayton². *(March 2024)*
- The Wichita Police Department positively identified the suspect in the 1989 rape and homicide of Krista Martin³. *(October 2024)*
- The Saline County Sheriff's Office positively identified a 2021 John Doe as Kenneth Reitchek⁴. *(December 2024)*

The Benefits of Outsourcing FGG Testing

Outsourcing of forensic DNA analysis can offer significant cost benefits by reducing the need for large capital investments in laboratory equipment, personnel, and training, allowing agencies to access specialized expertise without building their own infrastructure. This is true, too, with FGG technology, and has been realized by federal, state, and local authorities alike.

Othram does casework with FBI, DOJ, the Department of the Interior and multiple local and state law enforcement agencies.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of how Kansas can leverage FGG to solve unidentified human remains, unsolved sexual assaults, unsolved cold case homicides, and contemporary major violent crimes. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Respectfully,



Brendan Belair
Chief Strategy Officer, Othram Inc.

¹ <https://dnasolves.com/articles/harold-james-crawford-kansas/>

² <https://dnasolves.com/articles/randy-bruce-clayton-kansas/>

³ <https://dnasolves.com/articles/krista-martin-wichita/>

⁴ <https://dnasolves.com/articles/saline-county-2021-reitchek/>