

RAPE Continued from Front Page

*investigators and supervisors who are reaching out via phone or email. Advocates in our Victim Services Division are also assisting in providing trauma-informed support to survivors. As promised, we will do everything we can to reach every person who filed an adult sex crime incident report.”*

Chief Finner was sworn in to take over the reins at HPD in April 2021, so this issue of labeling cases as “Suspended – Lack of Personnel” preceded him by five (5) years of being HPD Chief and seemingly started after former HPD Chief McClelland departed in February 2016. Chief McClelland was originally appointed as HPD Chief by former Mayor Parker in 2010, where he served until his retirement. Former HPD Chief Art Acevedo served in the role from November 2016 through April 2021, which is seemingly aligned with the timeframe the activity began.

According to Chief Finner, he ordered his HPD departments to stop using the code the year he was appointed, in 2021, which many departments clearly didn’t adhere to.

Two of the primary questions needing answers are why anyone thought this code-labeling activity was a good idea to implement in 2016, and why anyone made the baffling decision to continue using the codes after Chief Finner allegedly told them to cease that activity in 2021.

Even in knowing the answers to those important questions—to which the community needs concrete answers and full transparency—it doesn’t take away the overwhelming hurt and glaring insensitivity that so many victims of sexual assault feel and have had to deal with, while receiving no justice and getting no answers because of this troubling activity.

To address the issue, Chief Finner recently demoted two assistant chiefs and sent out a department-wide memo indicating they no longer have the “Suspended - Lack of Personnel” code as an option to select in the system. However, the impact of this shocking revelation has reopened numerous painful wounds and traumatic memories that these sexual assault victims have had to endure.

According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), which is the nation’s largest anti-sexual violence organization, every 68 Seconds, an American is Sexually Assaulted. They also state that sexual violence affects hundreds of thousands of Americans each year, and while efforts are being made to address the issue, only 25 out of every 1,000 rapists end up in prison.

In the state of Texas, the statute of limitations for the crime of Sexual Assault is within ten (10) years after the commission of the offense, unless the crime is committed against a child, to which there is no time limit. There are two circumstances in which there is no time limit if the offense does not involve a child, which specifically are if: **(1) during the investigation of the offense biological matter is collected and the matter: (a) has not yet been subjected to forensic DNA testing; or (b) has been subjected to forensic DNA testing and the testing results show that the matter does not match the victim or any other person whose identity is readily ascertained; or (ii) probable cause exists to believe that the defendant has committed the same or a similar sex offense against five or more victims. The time limit is two (2) years from the date the offense was discovered if the offense is punishable**

as a state jail felony under 22.011(f)(2), meaning an offense under 22.011(a)(1) and the actor is a health care services provider who, in the course of performing an assisted reproduction procedure on the other person, uses human reproductive material from a donor knowing that the other person has not expressly consented to the use of material from that donor.

The backlog of untested rape kits is a national issue that prevents victims, and those accused of sexual assault crimes, from getting the justice they deserve.

According to RAINN, the source of the untested rape kit backlog stems from two main sources:

1) **Evidence was never sent to the crime lab.** In the last decade, cities and states across the country have discovered DNA evidence from thousands of untested rape kits that were collected by law enforcement or during sexual assault forensic exams, but never sent to crime labs for analysis. Failure to track kits once they have been collected and to advance them to crime labs for testing has been a major source of this problem. Increased public attention has led to states actively auditing their law enforcement evidence rooms and other relevant spaces.

2) **Evidence arrived at a crime lab but was never tested.** In some instances, the volume of untested DNA evidence has outpaced the resources to test, process, and profile samples in crime labs. This has led to evidence being stored at crime labs but remaining untested for prolonged periods of time. With the support of the federal government, the problem of untested kits at crime labs has significantly decreased. However, it remains imperative to ensure that public crime labs have the necessary capacity to keep up with testing demands.

There is no question that rape kits contain crucial DNA evidence that can lead to a confession from a potential suspect, or the prosecution of a rapist that can potentially link them to other unsolved sexual assault crimes. It is extremely common to think about the victims who have been sexually assaulted, which is extremely important, but there are also individuals who have been arrested, charged, and convicted in many sexual assault cases where the rape kit testing never took place and they could be innocent.

The untested rape kit issue is extremely robust and troubling, but it is something that adequate funding and dedicated commitment can address, along with helping victims of sexual assault.

RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline at 800.656.HOPE (4673) in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country and operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense. RAINN also carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. Their website is <https://www.rainn.org/>, and they are available 24/7/365.

Here in the City of Houston, the Houston Area Women’s Center has a 24-hour Rape Crisis Line that can be called at 713-528-7273. HPD also has a Victim Services Unit with a sexual assault information line that can be called 24-hours-a-day at 713-308-1400.

FIRE Continued from Front Page



thousands of cattle have been killed by the wildfires. “I know one rancher near Canadian who lost 280 mama cows,” AgriLife Extension agent Andy Holloway said.

Even if the millions of cattle in the Panhandle survive, how will they feed? The grassland that they typically munch on has been burned to cinders by the flames. Texas Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller said he knew of a rancher who had 1,500 head of steer but “no grass and no water,” which could force him to relocate the animals.

And at least two people have died in the fires. 83-year-old grandmother Joyce Blankenship died in Stinnett when her home was engulfed by flames. And truck driver Cindy Owens, 44, was traveling in Hemphill County (near the town of Canadian) when she got trapped by the flames and suffered severe burns. She died at an Oklahoma City hospital.

Here in Houston, local residents may feel powerless to help, as the fires are blazing so far away (after all, Borger and Amarillo are over nine hours away by car). Thankfully, there are a plethora of ways to help those affected from afar. The Panhandle Disaster Relief

• Hemphill County Animal Supply Point at Canadian AH&N Ranch Supply, 100 Hackberry St., Canadian. Contact Andy Holloway at 806-323-9114.

NBC’s Austin affiliate KXAN also suggests that to make donations for people who lost their homes in Hemphill County, go to First Baptist Canadian at <http://fbccanadian.org/firehelp/>. Nexstar Media Group, which KXAN is a part of, also set up a Red Cross online donation portal to raise money for disaster relief.

The Austin Disaster Relief Network said it is preparing to respond to the fires as well. “We’re praying and monitoring the situation,” said Executive Director Dwight Bailey Jr. “Many of these people, including family members of friends I know personally, have been forced to evacuate and could lose everything overnight.” The nonprofit is encouraging the public to support its disaster response efforts by donating at [adrm.org/txpanhandle](http://adrm.org/txpanhandle).

CLASSIFIEDS

HOUSTON-GALVESTON AREA COUNCIL

Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Public Services – E-Procurement Systems and Related Products and Services – EP10-24

H-GAC is soliciting responses for selecting qualified manufacturers, dealers, distributors, and service providers for e-procurement systems and related services to make these types of products and services available to Customers of the HGACBuy Cooperative Purchasing Program under blanket type contracts.

To view the solicitation documents, visit <https://www.hgacbuy.org/bid-notices>.

Response Deadline: April 18, 2024 @ 12:00 P.M. CST

LEGAL NOTICE

Application has been made with the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission for a wine and beer retailer's on permit by Oishii dba 888 Oishii LLC, to be located at 3764 Richmond Ave, Houston, Harris county, Texas. Officers of said owner are Danqiu Lu.

PUBLIC NOTICE


SBA Towers IV, LLC proposes to build a 145-foot Monopole Communications Tower at the approx. vicinity of 15049 2/3 Wallisville Road, Harris County, Houston, Texas 77049. Lat: [29-48-30.65] Long: [-95-10-11.89]. Public comments regarding potential effects from this site on historic properties may be submitted within 30 days from the date of this publication to: *Trileaf Corp. Cate Wiggins, c.wiggins@trileaf.com, 2550 S IH 35, Suite 200, Austin, TX 78704. 512.519.9388.*

LEGAL NOTICE

Choice Partners (CP), a national purchasing cooperative and division of the Harris County Department of Education, has issued the following Requests for Proposals (RFPs):

- RFP 24/028SG – Textbooks, Library Books, Printed Instructional Resources, and Related Items. Proposals are due March 28, 2024, 2:00 PM CT.
- RFP 24/029SG – Curriculum, Instructional Programs, Assessment Resources, and Related Items. Proposals are due March 28, 2024, 2:30 PM CT.
- RFP 24/030SG – Digital/Internet Instructional Applications, Platforms, Content, and Related Items. Proposals are due March 28, 2024, 3:00 PM CT.

All proposals must be submitted via the HCDE online eBid System at <https://hcdeebid.ionwave.net>. Interested proposers may go to [www.choicepartners.org](http://www.choicepartners.org) and/ or call 877-696-2122 for more information.



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