

Virginia Black leaders question DNA probe

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) - After Black community leaders complained to Police Chief Timothy J. Longo that DNA dragnet testing of Black men amounted to racial profiling, Longo agreed in mid-April to place limits on the tests.

Police can no longer request cheek swabs from Black men simply because they look suspicious or resemble a police sketch of the rapist. Officers now must notify a supervisor first, then inform the men stopped that they do not have to give a sample. If the men refuse, the officers will need to get a court order.

University of Virginia graduate student Steven Turner became the latest target of a DNA dragnet for a serial rapist while bicycling near campus.

Turner, 27, said he refused to give the officers a cheek swab that August night, then refused again when police showed up at his home seven months later, because he felt his rights were being violated.

It turned out police were looking for him, in response to a call about "a suspicious person riding a bike."

In a practice decried as racist, police have stopped nearly 200 Black men to ask them for cheek-swab tissue

samples.

"The question was not my guilt or innocence," Turner said. "I know where my DNA has been."

Police began stopping Black men for DNA tests in November 2002, then stepped up the program last year after a victim got a good look at the rapist and described him as a 6-foot Black man in his early 20s with an athletic build and unnaturally White, bulging eyes. The rapist is being sought for six attacks in the area between 1997 and 2003.

Of the 197 Black men who had been stopped by police and asked to give a sample, 187 complied and all were cleared. Longo said police would return or destroy the samples.

In Turner's case, two officers showed up at his home in March requesting a sample again. He contacted Rick Turner, U.Va.'s dean of Black studies, who put together a community forum after receiving other complaints about the testing.

"The African-American men in this community had to tell their stories about the humiliation they felt," said Rick Turner, who is not related to Steven Turner.

Not everyone has objected to the testing. The officers

"were just doing their job," said Gary Spry, a Black barbecue shop owner who has not been stopped by police.

But U.Va. student Kasie Scopetti said police have mishandled the investigation. "I want them to do their job, but I also believe there are certain individual liberties that can't be infringed on," Scopetti said.

Jessica McGrane of the Sexual Assault Resource Agency said the police investigation has damaged race relations in Charlottesville, best known as the home of Thomas Jefferson and the university he founded. The city by the Blue Ridge Mountains has 41,000 residents, 22 percent of them Black.

McGrane, a counselor, said the case perpetuates a rape myth. "There is a myth that Black men rape and they rape White women they don't know. The truth of the matter is the perpetrator and the victim are usually the same race and 85 percent of the victims know their attacker," she said.

Kent Willis, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia, said it is unlikely the DNA dragnet will catch the rapist.

"DNA dragnets are ineffective and a waste of police resources," Willis said. "What they tend to be is a

way for police to demonstrate to the public that they are doing something, that they are taking steps to solve the crime."

In the Baton Rouge, La., area, police took more than 1,000 DNA samples from White men, based on a psychological profile and witness accounts, while looking for the killer of five women. A Black man ultimately was arrested last May in the slayings. "They wasted huge amounts of money, and that process did not get them any closer to the killer," Willis said.

But Longo said DNA testing is the most efficient way to eliminate suspects, and the approach in Charlottesville is more focused than the DNA dragnet in Louisiana.

"We weren't approaching and accosting Black men on the street," he said. Instead, officers had to have a reason to think the man was suspicious, such as a tip to police, the chief said.

Longo said last week that Turner is not considered a suspect in the rapes.

Turner said authorities need to emphasize the right to refuse. "They are allowed to use DNA testing," he said. "But they are not allowed to misuse it, and that's what's happening here."

Supporters of gun control rally in capitol

WASHINGTON (AP) - Nick Wilcox wore a button with a picture of his late daughter and spoke of the satisfaction of joining other gun-control advocates Sunday at a rally to urge renewal of a federal ban on assault weapons.

"It's always gratifying to be with kindred spirits, and that's what this is," said Wilcox, whose 19-year-old daughter, Laura, was one of two workers at a mental health department office in California shot to death in 2001 by a patient.

The assailant used a 9mm semiautomatic handgun with an illegal 30-round clip, Wilcox said.

"I don't believe assault weapons belong on our streets. If people want to play with such tools, they should join the military," said Wilcox, who came from Nevada County, Calif. with his wife, Amanda, for the second "Million Mom March."

The demonstration, attended by about 2,000 people, was much smaller than the original one, which took place on Mother's Day four years

ago.

Several hundred gun rights supporters also held their own rally, organized by Second Amendment Sisters, at Freedom Plaza near the White House.

Speakers at the "Halt the Assault" rally reminded the crowd to "Remember November!" as they spoke mainly of a need to renew a ban on assault rifles that is to expire Sept. 13.

"We are working very hard in Iraq to get AK-47s and Uzis off the streets. The president says we're fighting the war on terror by doing that," said Rep. Chris van

Hollen, D-Md. "What about the terror right here on our streets at home?"

He also decried a provision in the law that critics contend allows owners of legal firearms to replace the housing for the firing mechanism and turn them into illegal assault weapons.

He tied the loophole to October 2002 sniper attacks that killed 10 people in van Hollen's Maryland district, Virginia and the District of Columbia.

"We need to close that loophole, because real bullets that killed real people went through those loop-

holes," van Hollen said.

Another Democratic representative, Carolyn McCarthy of New York's Long Island, urged people to volunteer to spread the word about the expiring assault weapons ban.

McCarthy's husband was among six people killed and her son was one of 19 wounded in a 1993 shooting spree aboard a Long Island Rail Road commuter train.

"We don't want to come back here on Mother's Day again. We want to be with our families and loved ones," McCarthy said. "Let's do it. Let's make it permanent."

Trouble brewing for collegiate vouchers

DENVER (AP) - Trouble is brewing for Colorado's first-in-the-nation college voucher plan.

State lawmakers say the \$2,400 voucher each student is expected to receive next fall will have to be cut to \$1,600 unless voters ease fiscal restraints embedded in the state Constitution or agree to use millions of dollars Colorado gets from the national settlement with the tobacco industry.

Without one of those steps, higher education and Medicaid will be on the chopping block when lawmakers have to cut an estimated \$254 million next year, said Rep. Brad Young.

The budget crisis threatens to overshadow the voucher program itself, which will give each high school graduate the annual stipend to use at any public college or university. Half-stipends can be used at three private schools: Regis University, the University of Denver and Colorado College.

The National Conference of State Legislatures said no other state has attempted a voucher program on such a scale.

Gov. Bill Owens championed the program and was expected to sign it into law Monday. He had pushed lawmakers to use \$850 million from Colorado's share of the tobacco settlement to stave off budget cuts, but the measure was killed.

"At this point, higher education is a priority for me and I will work to do everything I can to assure that we have as attractive a voucher as possible," Owens said.

Opponents complained that giving state funds to private colleges would draw money away from state institutions and could be challenged in court.

Owens and others, however, said vouchers would encourage more students to go to college. And education officials warned that public universities could be forced to close their doors or become private without vouchers because the state is caught between conflicting constitutional requirements: The Taxpayer's Bill of Rights limits how much the state can tax and Amendment 23 requires annual increases to K-12 schools.

Lawmakers tried to fix the dilemma but failed this year to come up with a plan to present to voters in November. Owens has said he is considering a special session to finish the job, while several groups are working on their own plans to put on the ballot.

University of Colorado President Betsy Hoffman said vouchers are a first step in giving the school the financial flexibility it needs until a long-term solution can be found. She said vouchers will help prevent the loss of talented teachers and researchers.

"To ensure future funding for Colorado's public higher education must involve more long-term solutions," she said.

Jerrett New, a 21-year-old industrial design student at Metropolitan State College of Denver, said he will stay in college, with or without vouchers. He said the state needs to resolve its budget crisis and stop balancing the budget on the backs of students.

"I think college is one of the most important things you can do," he said. "It determines what kind of job you get and how much you earn, which affects the taxes you pay."

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