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## Our View: Dollars to lab a wise investment

*Posted: 07/11/2009 07:07:12 AM PDT*

For thousands of rape victims and their families, their anguish was compounded recently when Sheriff Lee Baca announced he no longer had the staff nor the dollars to examine DNA evidence of open cases.

Frustrating for victims, yes. Worse, scary for the county population knowing that the budgetary snafu meant rapists and other sexual offenders would remain out there, free to commit more crimes and never to feel the cold steel of police handcuffs on their wrists nor see the inside of a courtroom.

Then, last week, Rep. Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena, said he was able to funnel \$1 million in federal stimulus money to help the sheriff and the Los Angeles Police Department - which share a crime lab - tackle the thousands of sexual assault kits that remain unopened.

The sheriff's department reported last month that it had 4,000 rape kits sitting in warehouses, and that was after the sheriff had launched an effort to reduce the backlog back in November.

The money - a prudent use of federal dollars and one that will create jobs as well as restart the wheels of justice - will go to Cal State Los Angeles, which oversees the 2-year-old, on-campus, joint LAPD-LASD crime lab through the **California Forensic Science Institute**.

The university and the lab will use the dollars, scheduled to arrive in September, to outsource about 250 of the highest-priority cases to private, accredited labs. Also, four graduate assistants studying criminalistics at CSULA will be hired to sort through the legal cases and untangle the red tape associated with each cold case. Currently, criminologists with the LAPD and LASD are making these phone calls and reading through these files, when their expertise can be better used analyzing the DNA samples themselves. Last, CSULA professors will be given time to research new and faster ways to analyze crime evidence and present their findings to the public.

Unlike an episode of "CSI," even the relatively new crime lab on the CSULA campus can't turn around cases within a few minutes. Some of the evidence is tainted with other bodily fluids or present other scientific challenges which adds to the time it takes to complete an investigation. The trail on other cases have become so cold that analyzing DNA data is not enough to bring a rapist to justice.