

McMillan, Acquanette (Netta)

From: William M. Paparian 1>
Sent: Sunday, January 25, 2026 9:58 AM
To: PublicComment-AutoResponse
Subject: Item #4 on the consent calendar - ACCEPT THE DONATION OF A DEDICATED TRACKING/TRAILING CANINE

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Several documented cases highlight how canine scent evidence (including bloodhound tracking and dog scent lineups) has contributed to wrongful convictions, often later overturned by DNA testing or other exculpatory evidence. Organizations like the Innocence Project have criticized this as unvalidated or "junk" forensic science, noting handler bias, contamination risks, and lack of scientific rigor. It has played a role in at least a few confirmed exonerations, though it's rarely the sole evidence.

Here are some notable examples:

Wilton Dedge (Florida) Wilton Dedge was wrongfully convicted in 1982 of sexual battery and sentenced to 22 years in prison. Dog handler John Preston testified that his dog linked Dedge to the crime scene via scent identification. Dedge was exonerated in 2004 after DNA testing proved his innocence. Preston's unreliable testimony (his dogs had a poor track record) factored into multiple wrongful convictions, and Florida courts later discredited his methods.

William Dillon (Florida) William Dillon spent 27 years in prison after a 1981 conviction for murder. John Preston's dog scent evidence was used to connect him to the crime. Dillon was exonerated in 2008 via DNA evidence showing he was innocent. This case is cited in the National Registry of Exonerations, emphasizing how unvalidated dog scent identification contributed to the miscarriage of justice.

Juan Ramos (Florida) Juan Ramos was convicted of murder and sexual battery in 1983, partly based on dog scent lineup evidence from John Preston's dog. The Florida Supreme Court overturned the conviction in 1984, ruling the scent evidence unreliable (Preston's dog had falsely identified scents in other cases). Ramos was retried and acquitted in 1987. This helped spark broader scrutiny of scent lineups.

Keith Pikett Cases (Texas) Deputy Keith Pikett's bloodhounds were involved in several controversial scent lineup cases in Texas during the 2000s. His dogs "identified" suspects in lineups, leading to convictions or charges later challenged as unreliable. The Innocence Project of Texas highlighted these in reports on junk science, linking them to potential wrongful convictions. Pikett's methods were criticized for lacking controls and scientific validity; some cases were dismissed or convictions questioned amid broader reviews of Texas wrongful convictions.

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Item 4

The Josh Connoles Case (Los Angeles, California) In 2003, Josh Connoles, a 26-year-old Caltech graduate student and environmental activist living in Pomona, California, was wrongfully arrested and detained for four days by the FBI and local law enforcement on suspicion of arson and vandalism targeting over 100 SUVs at dealerships in the San Gabriel Valley, including areas near Pasadena. The attacks involved firebombing and spray-painting vehicles at locations such as a Hummer dealership in West Covina. Authorities relied heavily on scent evidence from a bloodhound named Knight, which reportedly followed a trail from a scent sample (a lighter or gauze pad collected at a crime scene) directly to Connoles's home. Connoles was released after prosecutors determined there was insufficient evidence to charge him, and the actual perpetrators—members of the Earth Liberation Front—were later identified separately. Connoles sued for civil rights violations, including false arrest and detention. In 2004, the City of West Covina settled for \$20,000 and issued a public apology. In 2005, the FBI settled for \$100,000 and a letter of regret, acknowledging the ordeal's impact on Connoles. The case highlighted concerns over the use of canine scent tracking in investigations, particularly when it forms a primary basis for suspicion without strong corroborating evidence.

- Dog scent evidence (especially lineups, where dogs pick from scented items) has contributed to at least three wrongful convictions overturned by DNA, per Innocence Project statements around 2009.
- Texas and Florida saw heavy use of scent lineups, with critics arguing they led to false positives due to cross-contamination, cueing by handlers, or poor training.
- Broader concerns include that canine evidence often relies on handler interpretation, and studies show dogs can be influenced by subtle human cues, leading to error rates far higher than claimed.

These cases underscore why many experts advocate treating canine scent evidence as corroborative at best—not standalone proof—requiring strict foundational showings of the dog's reliability, training, and trail conditions to avoid miscarriages like the Josh Connoles incident. While powerful for generating leads in searches, overreliance has proven risky in court.