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Worthy creates unit to review gun cases

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Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy announced the creation of a forensic evidence review unit Friday in response to the ballistics testing debacle that led to the closure of the Detroit Police Crime Lab in September.

A group of assistant prosecutors will work full-time reviewing cases involving firearms evidence dating to 2003. Worthy said she expects the project to last at least three years.

"If nothing else, I want people to continue to have confidence in the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office and the criminal justice system," Worthy said. "We are addressing this problem in an open and forthright manner."

James Neuhard, director of the State Appellate Defender Office, said the review will go back five years for firearms cases for incarcerated individuals and any other cases requested by a defense attorney or by a defendant.

"Prosecutor Worthy's openness and willingness to retest firearm evidence a defendant, or a defense attorney requests, is unprecedented," Neuhard said.

The City of Detroit is funding the project, Worthy said. However, City Council must still approve any contracts and any final cost.

In September, Michigan State Police released a preliminary audit of the Detroit crime lab that found, among other things, an error rate of 10% in 200 firearms cases it reevaluated.

The audit also found evidence could have been contaminated.

Detroit Mayor Ken Cockrel Jr. and Police Chief James Barren then shut down the lab, including the units that analyzed DNA, fingerprints, chemicals and explosives.

Under Worthy's plan, the evidence review unit will have an investigation group consisting of assistant prosecutors and an investigator, and a review group comprised of prosecutors, defense attorneys and possibly former judges.

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