



Harris County DA Sends Notice Regarding HFSC Latent Print Manager

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Harris County District Attorney's Office has distributed the [attached notice](#) to defense attorneys and prosecutors informing them of an incident more than nine years ago involving Timothy Schmahl, who has served as the Houston Forensic Science Center's Latent Print manager since May 2014. Prosecutors believe this letter is in accordance with Texas' Michael Morton Act that requires disclosures to defense attorneys of information deemed potentially relevant to criminal prosecutions.

The incident noted in the letter began in 2005 when Schmahl was employed as a Latent Print Examiner by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation Division of Forensic Science. Schmahl compared photographs of a suspect's fingerprint images found in records to images of fingerprints found in the victim's home. He also had fingerprint images of other residents who lived with the victim. Using a new digital software, Schmahl mislabeled the fingerprints. As a result, a fingerprint found on a rear door of the home was reported as being the suspect's, when in fact the fingerprint belonged to a relative of the victim. The prints were correctly matched, but the names on the photographs were incorrectly labeled. Schmahl caught the error prior to trial, and notified

prosecutors and other stakeholders that the print belonged to the victim's daughter. The suspect was released and the charges against him were dropped.

After a thorough [investigation](#), the Georgia Bureau of Investigation concluded that Schmahl handled "the discovery of his error with the utmost integrity." The investigation included a root-cause analysis of the incident, and changes were made to procedures to ensure similar errors would not reoccur. The lab's two accrediting agencies agreed with the finding of the internal investigation and did not take action.

After leaving the Georgia Bureau of Investigation in 2008, Schmahl worked for the U.S. Army's Defense Forensic Science Center. Schmahl was a member of a deployable operation that took the collection and analysis of forensic material to the battlefield. He deployed three times to Afghanistan. During his first deployment, Schmahl was the Lead Latent Print Examiner and helped establish a forensic lab in Kandahar. During Schmahl's last two deployments he served as a Laboratory Manager overseeing five forensic disciplines. During almost six years with the Defense Forensic Science Center, Schmahl was awarded two Achievement Medals for Civilian Service, two Commander's Awards for Civilian Service, three Secretary of Defense Medals for the Global War on Terror, two Non-Article 5 NATO Medals, one Superior Civilian Service Award and was selected as the United States Army Criminal Investigation Division Command's Civilian of the Year in 2012.

In Schmahl's nine months with the Center, he has built a team of Latent Print Examiners certified by the International Association for Identification. This group has replaced an expensive outsource contract that previously provided services to the Houston Police Department. The team is providing quality, efficient services to police and other agencies. Schmahl has also started the process of digitizing the lab, while working closely with HFSC's expanded Quality Division.

"Tim Schmahl is providing excellent leadership and experience to HFSC's Latent Print Section. We are excited to see what lies ahead for the Section," said HFSC CEO and President Daniel Garner.

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