

# How a simple cotton swab can catch and convict repeat violent criminals in Georgia.



On Dec. 6, 2004, someone broke into 21-year-old Johnia Berry's apartment and brutally stabbed her to death. Johnia was entering the master's program at the University of Tennessee. DNA evidence was collected from the crime scene, but no suspects were identified and law enforcement officials had no viable leads.

Nearly three years later, Taylor Lee Olson was arrested for aggravated burglary and theft. He voluntarily submitted a DNA sample which was found to match the DNA evidence collected at the murder scene, and Olson was indicted for Johnia's murder. Before his case was tried, Olson committed suicide in prison.

Johnia's parents, Mike and Joan Berry, residents of Lawrenceville, Ga., were determined to honor their daughter and to be a force for change in passing laws to stop this sort of senseless pain from coming to other families. In May 2007, Tennessee's governor signed into law the "Johnia Berry Act," which requires anyone arrested for a violent crime to provide a DNA sample at booking – when fingerprints and mugshots are collected. The Berrys also pushed for more funding for Tennessee's forensic labs. Now it is their goal, along with Keep Georgia Safe.org, to see Georgia enact a DNA Arrestee Law.

A simple cotton swab can be a major crime fighting tool. For the last 15 years, DNA evidence has been the most effective and valuable weapon used to identify the perpetrator in an unsolved rape or murder case while helping to exonerate those under suspicion, or worse, those falsely accused. DNA is already collected in every federal arrest. Twenty-one states have now passed DNA Arrestee Laws, including Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and South Carolina.

Gary Martin Hays, founder of KeepGeorgiaSafe.org, was contacted by Joan Berry, who is seeking the organization's help in getting a DNA Arrestee Law introduced here in Georgia. "We anticipate the filing of DNA legislation this next session," says Hays. "Rep. Rob Teilhet quickly saw how this law could bring repeat violent criminals to justice much quicker, exonerate the innocent and protect the citizens of Georgia, while helping reduce costs in our criminal justice system."



*Remembering Johnia Berry – from left Joan Berry, Johnia's mother, Gary Martin Hays, founder of KeepGeorgiaSafe.org and Mary Ellen Fulkus, executive director of KeepGeorgiaSafe.org*



*Johnia Berry, 2004*



For more information on DNA arrestee laws, visit [www.DNASaves.org](http://www.DNASaves.org).  
To stay updated on Rep. Teilhet's bill in Georgia, please visit [www.KeepGeorgiaSafe.org](http://www.KeepGeorgiaSafe.org).