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State lawmaker seeks aid for more police DNA tests

\$400,000 a year would reduce backlog, he says

By FRANK WITSIL
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Flanked by uniformed police chiefs in the Wixom city chamber Thursday, state Rep. Craig DeRoche said he would fight for increased funding of DNA testing.

DeRoche, R-Novi, said the State Police needs about \$400,000 annually to reduce the burgeoning backlog of 76,000 cases that need DNA analysis.

The State Police gets about 50,000 DNA samples a year, and it can take nearly a year, in some cases, for police agencies to receive results, DeRoche said.

He pointed to a recent case:

Last year, Wixom police released a rape suspect, Jamey Johnson, 29, of Wixom, because they could not get a quick analysis of his DNA.

Eight months later, when the analysis was returned to them, police arrested Johnson. The

DNA evidence helped convict him of first-degree criminal sexual conduct. But, police said, while he was free he allegedly committed two rapes in Highland Township.

"I'm here to get behind the Michigan State Police so we can prevent another tragedy," DeRoche said, laying out his plan with poster-size charts. "In the absence of this, I think you will see more incidents like this."

In other cases, DeRoche said, DNA analysis would help clear suspects.

DeRoche's plan calls for: a state resolution that would ask Congress for federal dollars, legislation that would increase the amount the State Police's crime labs get from the general fund and a checkoff box on state income tax forms.

Under the checkoff plan, taxpayers would be asked if they want to contribute \$2 or \$3 to a forensic laboratory fund, DeRoche said. That could add up to an estimated \$500,000 to \$800,000 a year.

DeRoche said he plans to intro-

duce the bills in the spring.

The three police chiefs at DeRoche's announcement — Clarence Goddlein of Wixom, James Petres of Northville and Lloyd Collins of South Lyon — said they count on the State Police analysis because they do not have labs of their own.

A quick turnaround on DNA analysis, which police are relying on more and more, is critical for retaining suspects, the chiefs said.

Matt Davis, spokesman for state Attorney General Mike Cox, said Cox supports the efforts to speed DNA analysis.

DeRoche said the state recently received a one-time federal grant of \$3 million to help clear the backlog of cases, but that will not be enough.

Projections indicate that even if the backlog is cleared, the State Police still will not process as many as 8,000 DNA cases a year — leaving a new backlog in four years of about 32,000 cases.

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