

Utah's Cold Case Coalition wants you to share your DNA with cops to help solve murders

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By Scott Pierce

The Utah Cold Case Coalition is urging people to voluntarily submit their DNA to a database readily accessible to law enforcement, but the ACLU of Utah is advising caution.

Inspired by a pair of high-profile cases solved with DNA submitted to a genealogy site — including the [arrest of the Golden State Killer](#) — the Coalition is asking Utahns to submit their DNA to GedMatch.com (go to [genesis.GedMatch.com](https://www.gedmatch.com)), which will share the information without requiring law enforcement to get a warrant. (Sites like Ancestry.com, 23andMe, FTDNA and MyHeritage do require warrants.)

“We have a very detailed list of all of the unsolved murders, disappearances and unidentified remains in Utah, and we realized that with a fair number of those, there is potentially DNA available,” said Coalition co-founder Karra Porter, a Salt Lake City attorney. “We just need more people to compare it to.”

The group suggests that Utahns upload their genetic profile to the open-source DNA-sharing website, which can be done at no cost. Police in California used the site to find a genetic match to a profile they'd created from DNA left at crime scenes attributed to the Golden State Killer. This narrowed their focus and led them to arrest Joseph James DeAngelo in connection with a dozen murders and more than 45 rapes between 1974 and 1986.

More recently, there was an arrest in a double murder in 1987 in British Columbia when GedMatch produced a link to second cousins of the suspect.

But the [American Civil Liberties Union is advising caution](#) when it comes to sharing DNA with GedMatch.

“In submitting our DNA for testing, we give away data that exposes not only our own physical- and mental-health characteristics but also those of our parents, our grandparents and, as in DeAngelo's case, our third cousins — not to mention relatives who haven't been born yet,” the ACLU posted on its website.

By uploading a detailed genetic profile to a public website, authorities likely violated the alleged perpetrator's privacy rights, the ACLU said.

“People may not be so troubled by such an intrusion when it comes to a serial killer, but imagine the implications of using this technique for shoplifters or trespassers.”

Porter, who said she has shared her DNA on the site, acknowledged that it is a “matter of personal preference.”

“I lead a very boring life, and I am not worried in the slightest about my DNA being in a database for law enforcement to compare,” she said. “If I have a second cousin who murdered teenagers, I want to help in any way I can.”

The UCCC is a nonprofit that lobbied for SB160, which passed both the Utah house and senate unanimously and was signed into law by Gov. Gary Herbert, Nicknamed "Rosie's Bill" after Rosie Tapia, a 6-year-old who was kidnapped from her family's Salt Lake home and murdered 22 years ago, it requires the establishment of a statewide, centralized cold-case database. And the hope is that a DNA match on GedMatch will allow police to identify Tapia's killer. "If you don't care [about sharing DNA] and you want to help bring closure to these families, this is one way to do it," Porter said.