

Carla Walker Act

Senator Cornyn; Rep. Kelly Armstrong & Rep. Swalwell

Overview: This bill will create two \$5 million pilot programs to support forensic genetic genealogy (FGG) DNA analysis to help solve previously unsolvable cold cases.

This legislation is named after Carla Walker, who was abducted in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1974 before being found dead three days later. While Carla Walker's brother, Jim, never stopped searching for his sister's killer, the case unfortunately went cold due to the limited forensic technology at the time. Forensic genetic genealogy DNA analysis was able to identify Glen McCurley, Jr. as Carla Walker's killer. McCurley confessed to the murder in 2021 and died in prison on July 14, 2023.

A recent innovation, FGG technology complements traditional DNA profiling by significantly improving the probability of finding a DNA match compared to traditional methods. The grant funding in this legislation would make this cutting-edge technology more widely available to investigative agencies.

FGG investigations provide a significant opportunity to bring answers to crimes that have remained unsolved for far too long. Where CODIS has returned no results, and victims and families still wait for answers, FGG offers them the hope they thought was gone.

Typically, when a suspect's identity is unknown, a crime laboratory uploads the genetic material recovered from a crime scene into the FBI's national database to search for DNA matches between the forensic sample and any known offenders. While this traditional form of forensic DNA profiling only examines 13-20 Short tandem repeat (STR) DNA markers, FGG technology examines significantly more Nucleotide Polymorphisms (SNPs). It does so by cross-referencing shared blocks of SNP markers with millions of people in public genetic genealogy databases. It can identify relatives of the genetic profile by uncovering shared blocks of DNA. This enables investigators to build family trees that help determine the sample's identity and solve cases.

If enacted, this bill would:

- Fund and implement a pilot program to fund forensic whole genome sequencing of genetic samples that have failed to lead to a DNA match.
- Fund and implement a pilot program to fund the investment in technology and equipment to conduct forensic genetic genealogy.

This bill will help investigative agencies better:

- Aid in resolving previously unsolvable cold cases;
- Assist in the identification of criminals;
- Seek justice for previously unidentified victims;
- Help exonerate wrongly accused suspects;
- Bring closure for the victims' loved ones.