

**OFFICE OF THE
ATTORNEY GENERAL
OF IOWA**

**Cold Case Unit
2025**

**ATTORNEY GENERAL
BRENN A BIRD**



IOWA ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

COLD CASE UNIT (CCU)

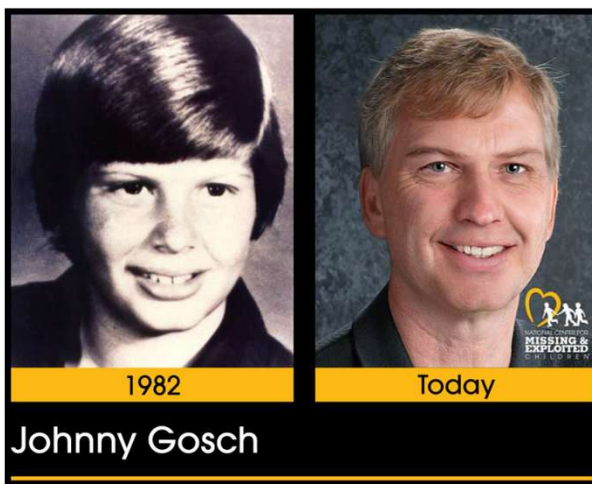
- What is a cold case?
- Why Do This and Why Now?
- Creation of CCU (LEIN)
- CCU as a partner
- CCU Procedures
- CCU Initiatives
- Questions?



WHAT IS A COLD CASE?

- Homicide (or suspected homicide)
- Missing person, suspicious circumstances
- Unidentified human remains

Active leads have been exhausted as determined by the originating law enforcement agency.



Why do this?

- Justice for victims
- Answers for families
- Accountability for the perpetrator



Mission: Assist law enforcement and prosecutors in cases involving unresolved homicides, missing persons under suspicious circumstances or unidentified human remains, by providing investigative, prosecution and victim service support. This partnership is performed with dedication and integrity.

Creation & Inception

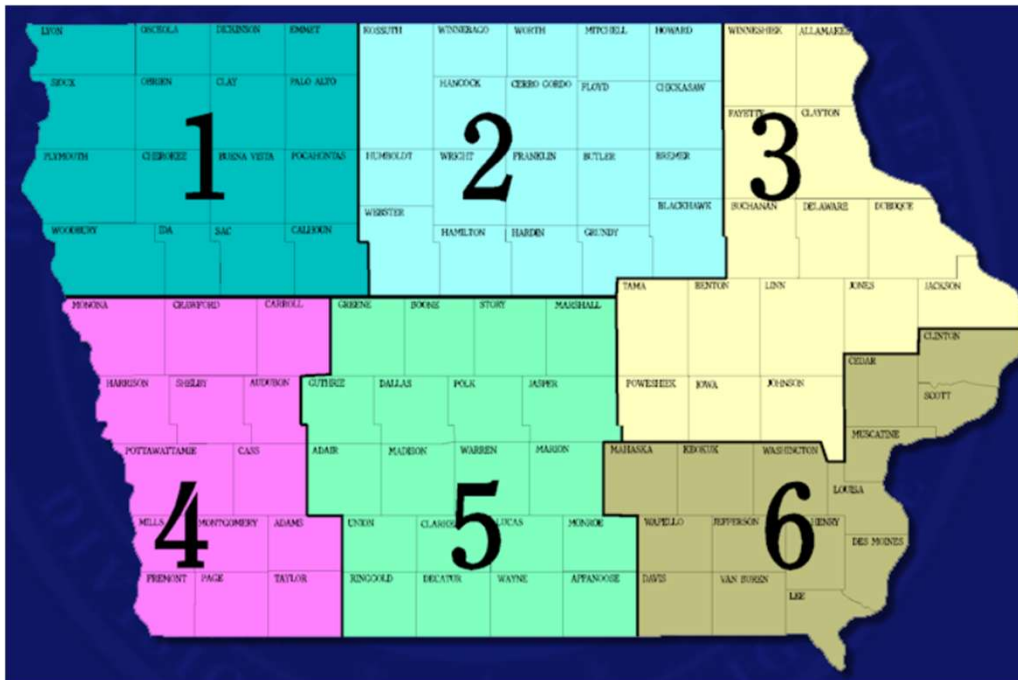
- January 2023 - AG Brenna Bird took office
- July 1, 2024 –
Legislative funding was approved for four investigators and one prosecutor
- September 2024 –
CCU investigators hired
 - Regional placement to partner with law enforcement agencies across Iowa



Attorney General Brenna Bird

CCU PERSONNEL AND ORGANIZATION

CCU investigators are assigned by Law Enforcement Intelligence Network (LEIN) regions, which are utilized as a guide for law enforcement outreach and coordination



- Assistant AG Scott Brown, Statewide Prosecutor
- Steve Ponsetto, Investigator/Team Leader (Regions 4, 5)
 - Retired DCI
- Chris Callaway, Investigator (Regions 1, 2)
 - Retired DCI
- Chad Lovig, Investigator (Regions 4, 5)
 - Retired Ames PD
- Jim McMillan, Investigator (Regions 5, 6)
 - Retired FBI

INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

- Iowa has over 400 cold cases
- AG CCU is an assistance unit
- Need to identify and prioritize cases
 - <https://iowacoldcases.org>
 - <https://missingpersons.iowa.gov>
 - <https://dps.iowa.gov/divisions-iowa-department-public-safety/iowa-division-criminal-investigation/identified-bodies>
 - National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
 - National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)
- Goal is to be an active partner:
 - Law Enforcement
 - Prosecution
 - Medical Examiners
 - Victim Advocates
 - Family



INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Partner agency assistance request

- Case referrals may come from a variety of sources
 - Law enforcement
 - Family members or their representative
 - Public tips

Evaluate case viability

- Suspects, witnesses, original investigators, and others still available?
- Evidence preserved and maintained?
- Records available?



Encourage anyone to report information about a case, even if it seems small or unimportant

Attorney General's Office Tip Lines:

- 800.242.5100
- coldcase@ag.iowa.gov

INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Case review

- Organize and review available records
- Comprehensive case timeline
- Locate witnesses, conduct follow up interviews
- Update investigation to current scientific standards
 - Evaluate evidence, determine viability for analysis
 - Submit to appropriate lab for examination/analysis



Utilize government and private resources

- National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs)
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
- FBI Violent Criminal Apprehension Program (ViCAP)
- Private DNA labs, investigative genetic genealogy
- Forensic Anthropology



INVESTIGATIVE PROCESS

Possible resolutions

- Criminal charges
- “Solved” but not charged
- Brought to modern standards but not solved

Case presented for prosecution, if appropriate

- County Attorney
- Attorney General’s Office

March 11, 2025

Attorney General Bird’s Iowa Cold Case Unit Announces Murder Charge for the 1989 Disappearance of Barbara Lenz

DES MOINES—Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird today announced an arrest for the murder of Barbara Lenz, who disappeared in 1989. This is the first arrest made in a case that the Iowa Cold Case unit has helped investigate. Attorney General Bird launched the statewide unit in July 2024.

Lenz was last seen on Saturday, May 6, 1989. Her boyfriend at the time, Robert Davis, reported dropping her off at her Woodbine, Iowa, apartment earlier that day. Lenz was supposed to visit her former boyfriend, and father of her 3-year-old child, in Omaha, Nebraska, but she never arrived.

Her disappearance was reported to the Woodbine Police Department. Investigations at Lenz’s home suggested she had been taken against her will. Over the years, investigations pursued numerous leads and searches, but Lenz was never found. The Iowa Cold Case unit brought fresh eyes and a focused team to dig through information, meet with witnesses, and loosen up leads in Lenz’s case.

“This arrest is a milestone in securing justice for Barbara Lenz,” said Attorney General Bird. “We are hoping to soon bring peace and answers to Barbara’s loved ones, who have waited 35 long years in the dark. I am deeply grateful to my team in the Iowa Cold Case unit, the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, Iowa State Patrol, the Harrison County Sheriff’s Office, the Harrison County Attorney’s Office, and the Woodbine Police Department who have, and continue to, work diligently to crack Barbara’s case. No one should get away with murder.”

Robert Davis, a 61-year-old man from Council Bluffs, and Lenz’s boyfriend at the time of her disappearance, was arrested on March 10. He was charged with First Degree Murder.

A criminal charge is merely an accusation, and all defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

The Iowa Attorney General’s Office and Harrison County Attorney’s Office will prosecute the case in Harrison County. The investigation into Barbara Lenz’s case is still active.

CURRENT CASE EXAMPLES

MISSING 46-YEAR-OLD MALE

- Family member contacted local police after reports of vehicle found in Mississippi River 2023
- Local agency contacted AG CCU for assistance in December 2024; investigation initiated
- Records analysis, database checks and entries
- Family, friend, and associate interviews
- DNA collection
- Determined last seen July 2004
- Traced to another state, located evidence of presence there
- Investigation ongoing, current case file 1,100+ pages

CURRENT CASE EXAMPLES

HELEN RENEE GROOMES

- 10/15/1977: Missing from Ottumwa, IA after a night out on her 15th birthday
- 03/30/1978: Body found near an island in Mississippi River near Elsberry, MO
- 04/05/1978: Buried as Jane Doe in Lincoln County, MO
- 11/03/2023: Body exhumed, remains forwarded to Southeast Missouri State University
- Samples obtained and tested by Othram, private lab in The Woodlands, TX
- January 2024: Possible family members identified through genetic genealogy
- 03/05/2024: Family member interviewed by Wapello County Sheriff's Office, DNA sample obtained
- 03/21/2024: DNA match confirmed, Helen Groomes identified



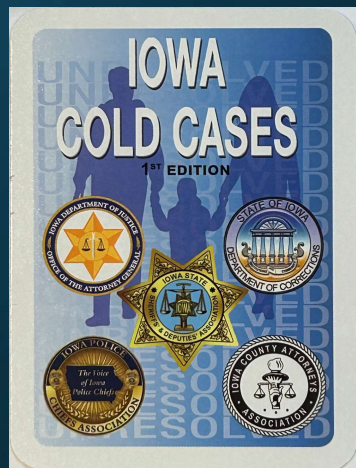
CURRENT CASE EXAMPLES

HELEN RENEE GROOMES

- Public contacting WCSO
- June 2025: WCSO requests AG CCU assistance
- August 2025: CCU, WCSO conduct investigation in Lincoln County, MO
 - Lincoln County Coroner
 - Lincoln County Sheriff's Office
 - Missouri State Highway Patrol, Marine Operations
- Investigation ongoing




CCU Initiatives




Cold Case Playing Cards

Created by and in coordination with:

- Iowa State Sheriffs and Deputies Association
- Iowa County Attorneys Association
- Iowa Police Chiefs Association
- Iowa Department of Public Safety Division of Criminal Investigation
- Iowa Department of Corrections
- IowaColdCases.org
- Iowa Attorney General's Office

A  **Gregory Allen Pekkala**




HOMICIDE VICTIM


October 9, 2018, Pekkala was found dead in his rural Hamilton Co. home. Pekkala operated Advanced Pain Clinics in Humboldt, Belmond and Iowa Falls.

Hamilton Co. Sheriff's Office
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

A 

2  **Donald John Murphy**




HOMICIDE VICTIM

July 20, 1984, Murphy was reported missing from the VA Hospital in Knoxville. In November 1984, Murphy's remains were located in northern Polk Co.

Polk Co. Sheriff's Office
Knoxville Police Dept.
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

2 

3  **James "Bill" & Kaidena "Kay" Wood**



HOMICIDE VICTIMS

July 30, 2011, Wood's rural Norwalk home was set a fire. Bill Wood was found dead inside; he had been shot. Their pick-up truck was found the next day in Kansas City, MO. Kay Wood has not been found.

Warren Co. Sheriff's Office
Iowa DCI
Iowa State Fire Marshal

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

3 

4  **Steven Leasure**




HOMICIDE SUSPECTED

May 2, 2015, Leasure was reported missing. June 8, 2016 human remains identified as Leasure were found at Lake West in Burlington.

Burlington Police Dept.
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

4 

5  **Emma Lewis**



HOMICIDE VICTIM

September 13, 1976, Lewis was found beaten to death in her Waukee home. Robbery appeared to be the motive.

Waukee Police Dept.
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

5 

6  **Wilma Nissen**



HOMICIDE VICTIM

October 4, 1978, Nissen was found dead along a rural gravel road in Lyon Co. She was not identified by name until 30 years later.

Lyon Co. Sheriff's Office
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

6 

7  **Dennison Stookesberry**



MISSING PERSON

February 15, 1999, Stookesberry was reported missing. He lived alone near Blakesburg. He was disabled, did not drive and was diabetic. Left behind were his meds and 4 dogs.

Wapello Co. Sheriff's Office
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

7 

8  **Valerie Klossowsky**



HOMICIDE VICTIM

June 15, 1971, 14 yr. old Klossowsky was found dead under a bridge along a rural Bremer Co. road. She had been strangled.

Bremer Co. Sheriff's Office
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

8 

9  **Phil Terrell**



HOMICIDE VICTIM

December 24, 1993, Terrell was reported missing from Des Moines. March 2, 1994, Terrell's decomposed body was discovered in a creek just south of Des Moines in Warren Co.

Warren Co. Sheriff's Office
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

9 

10  **Ryan Fulkerson**



HOMICIDE VICTIM

May 11, 2014, Fulkerson was found beaten and shot along a rural road just north of Decatur City.

Decatur Co. Sheriff's Office
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

10 

J  **Scott Tompkins**




HOMICIDE VICTIM


November 29, 1995, Tompkins was shot several times near his parked vehicle in Muscatine.

Muscatine Police Dept.
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

J 

Q  **Jeffery "Jo Jo" Zolliecoffer**




HOMICIDE VICTIM

September 15, 1989, Zolliecoffer's weighted down body was pulled from the Cedar River just north of the Waterloo business district. He had been shot several times.

Waterloo Police Dept.

If you have any information,
email coldcase@ag.iowa.gov
or call 800-242-5100

Q 

K  **Marvin Brandland**



HOMICIDE VICTIM

October 30, 1982, Brandland was confronted at his Ft. Dodge home by a masked "trick-or-treater" brandishing a gun, stating "Trick or treat, give me your money or I'll shoot." Brandland reached for the gun and was shot.

Fort Dodge Police Dept.
Iowa DCI

If you have any information,
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K 

CCU Initiatives

- Website/online tip submission
- Provide LE training
- Case presentations
- Media appearances

<https://www.iowaattorneygeneral.gov/for-crime-victims/iowa-cold-case>

[HOME](#) | [FOR CRIME VICTIMS](#) | [IOWA COLD CASE](#)

Iowa Cold Case

[COLD CASE TIP FORM](#)

In 2023, the Iowa Attorney General's Office Cold Case Unit was established with the goal of aiding local law enforcement in their unresolved homicide cases. The Cold Case Unit consists of experienced investigators and prosecutors who work in partnership with sheriff's offices and police departments to prioritize and investigate cold cases of homicide, missing persons under suspicious circumstances, and unidentified human remains

The Cold Case Unit is located within the Statewide Prosecution Section of the Criminal Justice Division with the overarching goals of:

- Justice for victims
- Answers for family
- Accountability for the perpetrator

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Cold Case Training, 04/22/2025

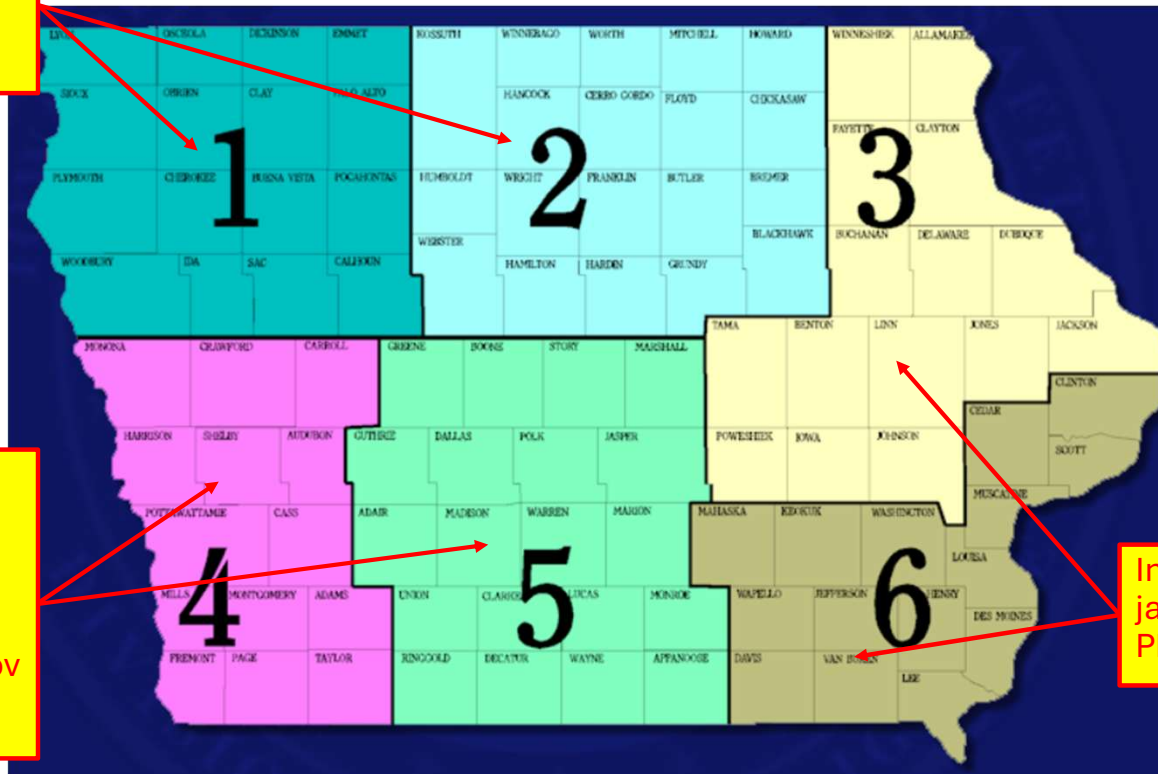
- Hosted by Polk County Sheriff's Office
- 60 attendees from 23 agencies/organizations
- Cold case best practices
- Analysis and intelligence
- DNA capabilities and future technology
- Genetic genealogy
- Forensic anthropology
- Cold case prosecutions

Collaboration Matters Contact Us!

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