Chris' Case: The Basics

In the middle of the night in July 2018, a woman in Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture, Japan, was attacked while walking home and forced to perform oral sex.

After the attacker fled, the woman spat out his semen, went home, gargled and rinsed her mouth, then reported the crime to the police. As a result, the sample collected from the victim for DNA analysis was difficult to test: it was a mixture of cells from both the victim and the perpetrator, and the amount of perpetrator's DNA was extremely small compared to the victim's.

In November 2021, three years and four months after the attack, Christopher Stephan Payne (Chris) was arrested and indicted on the grounds that his DNA profile is "consistent" with the perpetrator's profile registered in the police DNA database. After the indictment, the court ordered a second DNA test, but this raised serious issues.

Aside from the DNA test results, there is no evidence pointing to Chris' guilt. On the contrary, he was working at a restaurant in Shibuya Ward, Tokyo, on the night of the incident. He had a Japanese girlfriend, and he sent her a message saying "Miss you so much" just five minutes after the attack took place. Chris' case is a clear instance where an innocent man was wrongfully prosecuted based on an unreliable DNA analysis.



The Dark Side of DNA Testing...

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Christopher Stephan Payne's Story

ver. 2

DNA evidence in Chris' Case

The Chiba Prefectural Police Scientific Investigation Laboratory analyzed the DNA samples collected from the victim. The laboratory attempted to isolate the perpetrator's sperm DNA using a process known as the two-stage cell lysis method. However, they obtained only a mixed result containing both the victim's and the attacker's DNA profiles. At that time, police were unable to identify a suspect.

In February 2020, in an entirely unrelated incident, Chris got drunk and fell asleep at the entrance of someone else's home in Yamanashi Prefecture. The homeowner called the police. Chris was arrested on the spot for trespassing and was released the following day. Before leaving, he agreed to a police officer's request to voluntarily provide an oral swab sample. To Chris, the Chiba incident was something he had absolutely no involvement in or knowledge of. However, the results showed that Chris' DNA profile was "consistent" with that of the perpetrator.

Seeking a more accurate DNA test, Chris requested a second analysis through his court-appointed attorney after indictment. The Chiba District Court then ordered Professor Y of K University to conduct the second test. However, Professor Y did not use the two-step cell lysis method and instead analyzed the evidence as-is, despite the huge disparity in the amounts of victim and perpetrator DNA.. This analysis also indicated that Chris' profile was "consistent" with the perpetrator's. Professor Y then calculated the probability of such a match to be approximately one in 17 trillion. When this overwhelming figure was reported to Chris' court-appointed defense attorney (though Professor Y later revised it to approximately 1 in 264 billion), the attorney believed obtaining an acquittal would be impossible. He persuaded Chris not to contest the charges, and a lay judge trial was scheduled to begin on January 16, 2023.

Support from Friends

To friends who knew Chris well, it was simply inconceivable that he could be the culprit. One of his supporters called as many as 50 law firms to find a lawyer willing to take on his defense and claim of innocence. In late December 2022, during this desperate search, they came across the Innocence Project Japan (IPJ) website and submitted a request for assistance. Believing there were serious flaws in the DNA evidence, an IPJ attorney met with Chris on January 10, 2023, just six days before the lay judge trial was scheduled to begin. When Chris immediately asked them to serve as his defense counsel, the IPJ attorney agreed to serve as his private defense counsel *pro bono* (in such cases, the court dismisses the court-appointed defense counsel). All scheduled dates for the lay judge trial were canceled. The fight to secure his acquittal officially began.

Guilty verdict in the district court

The defense attorney argued: "Professor Y's analysis does not constitute conclusive evidence of guilt. Chris was working in Shibuya, Tokyo, at the time of the attack, and there is a shift schedule that proves this. When considered together with the message he sent to his girlfriend just five minutes after the incident, this evidence conclusively establishes his innocence." However, on July 9, 2024, the Chiba District Court sentenced Chris to eight years in prison with labor. The court ruled that a guilty verdict could be based solely on the DNA test results, asserting: "According to Professor Y's analysis, the defendant is the only person on Earth with the same DNA profile as the perpetrator. There is no contradiction between being the perpetrator and sending the text message." The court relied entirely on the flawed DNA analysis and failed to properly consider the clear evidence pointing to his innocence.

The Appellate Court Overturned the Guilty Verdict

During the appeal process, two critical issues came to light.

1. Fabrication and Alteration of DNA Raw Data

Dr. Simon Ford, an American expert in DNA analysis, advised the defense team on the critical importance of evaluating raw data. Dr. Ford's analysis revealed that Professor Y had manually added data for at least four loci where the typing software did not detect a match —altering them to match Chris' profile—and deleted data for at least one locus that contradicted Chris' profile.

2. Failure to Investigate Mobile Location Data

Establishing Chris' cell phone location data would definitively prove his innocence. In May 2025, the defense obtained Chris' Google account credentials, provided them to the prosecution, and requested a formal investigation into his whereabouts at the time of the incident. Although the police had seized Chris' phone upon his arrest, they had merely confirmed with the mobile carrier that the retention period for location logs had expired— making no further effort to investigate his location through available digital records.

However, the Tokyo High Court rejected most requests for evidence—including the examination of Professor Y—and closed the proceedings after holding only two hearings.

On December 11, 2025, the High Court issued its ruling, acknowledging that serious doubts had arisen regarding Professor Y's DNA analysis, overturning the guilty verdict, and remanding the case back to the district court for a retrial. While overturning the conviction marks significant progress, the High Court should have issued a full acquittal once it recognized that doubts arose regarding the reliability of DNA evidence. The defense appealed to the Supreme Court, but the appeal was dismissed on June 1, 2026. The case will now be reheard in a new lay judge trial at the Chiba District Court.

Support Chris!

Chris was wrongly convicted of a crime he did not commit based on DNA evidence that systematically ignored exculpatory evidence.

The court has repeatedly denied bail, keeping Chris in custody for nearly five years. This is a textbook example of Japan's notorious "hostage justice." Due to his prolonged detention, Chris' health has severely deteriorated; since the appellate court's ruling, he has been suffering from unexplained nosebleeds, headaches, and chronic pain. The medical care provided in detention is wholly inadequate, withholding the thorough medical examinations and treatment he could receive if released on bail.

The DNA analysis—presented by the prosecution as decisive evidence of guilt—was tampered with: data favorable to Chris was deleted, and the remaining results were manipulated so as not to contradict his profile.
If the police and prosecutors had not placed undue emphasis on the DNA test results and had instead actively investigated the location data from the cell phone seized at the time of his arrest, Chris would never have been indicted.

Chris' case exposes serious and alarming systemic flaws in Japanese criminal investigation and judicial proceedings.

We urgently ask for your attention and support in fighting this injustice!

For more detailed information on Chris' case, please visit the official website of Innocence Project Japan (IPJ)!