



Ill. prosecutor discounts DNA evidence

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WAUKEGAN, Ill., Dec. 15 (UPI) -- An Illinois state prosecutor isn't letting exculpatory DNA evidence stop him from trying suspects in certain murder and rape cases, observers say.

Lake County, Ill., prosecutor Michael Mermel is pressing ahead with three cases involving the slayings of three girls and the rape and battery of a 68-year-old woman despite DNA evidence in each case ruling out the suspects, the Chicago Tribune reported Monday.

In each of the cases, all likely to go to trial in 2009, Mermel is arguing that other evidence -- mainly confessions and witness identification -- is more valuable than genetic material. In the case of an 11-year-old slaying victim, Mermel suggests the girl might have been sexually active and called the DNA evidence "a red herring," the Tribune said.

Mermel's attitude toward DNA evidence is startling to criminal justice experts, the newspaper said.

"The vast majority of prosecutors in the United States generally are willing to walk away from a case where DNA excludes a suspect," Joshua Marquis, an Oregon prosecutor and member of the board of directors of the National District Attorneys Association, told the Tribune.