This ‘superstar’ genetic analyst cracked criminal cases and locked people up for three decades. New findings reveal she may have fudged the data

For nearly three decades, Yvonne “Missy” Woods was Colorado’s star forensic scientist, relied on by police and prosecutors to test DNA evidence in the state’s most baffling crimes.

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Then, in November, Woods abruptly resigned. The same day, the Colorado Bureau of Investigation said it had discovered anomalies in her work during an internal review and was launching a criminal probe.

The unfolding scandal—potentially one of the largest in the history of forensic DNA testing, according to experts—is throwing Colorado’s criminal justice system into chaos. The state said it would need to review and retest approximately 3,000 DNA samples that Woods handled. Public defenders estimate thousands of cases could be affected.

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At the center of the storm is a mystery: Was Woods just sloppy, or has she been purposefully cutting corners for decades to put people behind bars?

“This is a huge, unprecedented mess,” said George Brauchler, a former district attorney in the Denver suburbs whose office oversaw numerous cases in which Woods testified. “I want to know, what in the world did she do?”

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But issues are popping up elsewhere in the state. On March 1, the Sheriff’s Office in Weld County, Colo., said it fired a veteran DNA analyst and will pursue criminal charges against her after anomalies in her work were discovered during the Woods investigation.

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