



The American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors

"Excellence Through Leadership in Forensic Science Management"

Comments on the National Commission on Forensic Science

On February 15, 2013, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Institute of Science and Technology (NIST) announced the creation of a National Commission on Forensic Science. The announcement declared the Commission will:

- 1) Develop policy recommendations for the United States Attorney General.
- 2) Provide a framework for coordination across forensic disciplines under federal leadership with state and local participation.
- 3) Consider endorsement of recommendations made by NIST-administered guidance groups who are to develop and propose discipline-specific practice guidance.

Most crime laboratories struggle day-to-day just keeping up with casework and are not able to devote attention to the "goings on" in Washington DC. When crime laboratory employees hear the word "commission," many think of "oversight."

Crime laboratories and their employees focus daily on the quality of the work performed. The ultimate goal must be to ensure crime labs are capable of keeping pace with the demand for services, scientific advances in the field, as well as procedural demands placed upon crime laboratories by the legal system. Key components in reaching this goal include:

- 1) **Accreditation and Certification**-Accreditation and personal certification of forensic scientists are proven tools to improve the quality of a forensic laboratory's work product. Crime laboratory directors strive to meet accreditation standards while providing timely forensic analysis. Accreditation is also tied to grant funding and database usage which is paramount in the existence of a crime laboratory. Funding limitations impact a laboratory's ability to pursue accreditation and to support certification of all forensic scientists.
- 2) **Funding**-Crime laboratories throughout the United States struggle each day to buy equipment and supplies, send employees to training, and provide overtime to meet the demands in an increasingly difficult budget time. In some crime laboratories, a large percentage of their budget is augmented by federal grants. If these grants were to go away, what would happen to the criminal justice system in which that laboratory serves? Long term sustained funding based on needs assessments must be considered as a requirement to advance forensic science.

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- 3) **Standard Practices** - Scientific Working Groups (SWGs) make recommendations in regards to training, technical guidance, competency, quality assurance and report writing. All forensic disciplines from toxicology to digital evidence deserve to be equally represented as NIST-administered guidance groups are established, as each discipline relies on the published guidelines daily to assist in their analysis. We must also not forget the medical examiners as they strive to create standards in regards to autopsies throughout the United States.


The American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD):

- Appreciates DOJ and NIST for recognizing the need for advancement of forensic science across the United States.
- Will review the notice in the Federal Registry and provide recommendations on candidates who represent the state and local community.
- Are encouraged by the recognition of the need for continued participation of the forensic practitioner in the advancement of forensic science.
- Look forward to continued work with Senator Leahy and other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee to ensure a mechanism is set in place for long-term support of state and local forensic service providers.

How and will the Commission advocate on behalf of all forensic science providers? How will the NIST-administered guidance groups compare to the SWGs? Is it necessary to retool the SWGs from ground zero or can we adopt the successful elements and apply them to the newly created NIST-administered guidance groups? If we don't, I fear there will be more delays in regards to our efforts to advance forensic science.

At this time, we cannot really say how this announcement will affect state and local crime laboratories. We don't even know what the Commission will look like or have concrete evidence to even know what their actual tasks will be. What we are sure about is the need for further forensic advancement and a national strategy for grants to aid in providing: accreditation, certification, capacity building, training and research and development.

At the end of the day, the question on everyone's mind is---Is this federalization of the forensic science system? Only time will tell.

Jill Spriggs 
ASCLD President
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