
Government of the District of Columbia



Department of Forensic Sciences

Testimony of
Max M. Houck, Ph.D.
Director, Department Of Forensic Sciences

**Hearing on the Mayor's Proposed FY15 Budget
for the Department Of Forensic Sciences**

Committee on the Judiciary
Tommy Wells, Chairperson
Council of the District of Columbia

April 17, 2014

Room 120
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004
10AM

Good morning Chairman Wells and staff, I am Dr. Max Houck the Director of the Department Of Forensic Sciences. I am pleased to testify before you today on Mayor Gray's Fiscal Year 2015 Budget and confidently share that the Department Of Forensic Sciences' FY 2015 proposed budget fully addresses the agency's funding needs.

The mission of the Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS) is to produce high quality, timely, accurate, and reliable forensic science with the use of the best available technology and practices, unbiased science, and transparency with the overall goal of enhancing public health and safety.

The agency is composed of three main science Divisions: Forensic Science Laboratory, Public Health Laboratory, and Crime Scene Sciences; and Four agency-wide services: Administrative Operations, Quality Assurance, Training and Development, and Information Technology. The DFS is housed in the Consolidated Forensic Laboratory (CFL), which is now a certified Platinum LEED facility.

Forensic Science Laboratory:

The FSL achieved international accreditation (also known as ISO 17025) for the Forensic Biology Unit, Fingerprint Unit, and the Firearms Examination Unit within eight months of the Department's opening. This is due in large part to the collective work of the entire agency, personnel, our Quality Assurance program, our Training and Development program, and our IT program. Also, during this timeframe, the FSL reduced its backlog of active D.C. cases by nearly 60 percent in DNA and more than 70 percent in firearms and fingerprints. A significant development for the Department included the hiring of an internationally acclaimed Digital Evidence expert to lead our new Digital Evidence Unit.

Public Health Laboratory:

The PHL received the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention approval to be a top-tier member of its Laboratory Response Network (LRN), joining 10 existing facilities nationwide as the front-line defense to respond to bioterrorism, chemical terrorism, and other public health emergencies. The District's PHL becomes the nation's 11th Level 1 Laboratory. These serve as surge-capacity labs for the CDC and can detect cyanide, nerve agents, and many toxic metals and industrial chemicals. To achieve this Level 1 distinction in its first year is astounding.

Crime Scene Sciences:

Since the beginning of January 2013, the CSS has been recruiting and interviewing hundreds of applicants for Crime Scene Scientists positions. The CSS now has 20 Crime Scene Scientists on board undergoing a rigorous training schedule. We hired several

managers to help supervise personnel, and oversee the development of Standard Operating Procedures and policies. CSS officially took over the Central Evidence Unit (formerly known as the Evidence Control Unit) from MPD on October 6, 2013. The first training ride between 7 DFS Crime Scene Scientists and MPD CSID officers is scheduled to begin this week.

Agency FY15 budget overview

DFS's proposed FY15 gross operating budget is \$15,762,593, which is \$2,494,964 or 18.8% percent higher than the Agency's FY14 gross budget of \$13,267,629. The FY15 proposed budget supports 136.3 full time equivalent (or FTE) positions, an increase of 11.1 positions from the FY14 level of 125.2.

The FY15 gross budget is comprised of \$14,266,000 dollars in local funds, which support 128.2 FTEs, \$759,000 in federal grant funds, which support 3 FTEs, and \$738,000 in intra-district funds, which support 2.1 FTEs. Respectively, these amounts represent a 15.1% increase of \$1,875,000 in local funds, 76.3% increase of \$329,000 increase in federal grant funds, and 65.3% increase of \$292,000 in intra-district funds over FY14.

The changes are attributed to factors such as establishing the Digital Evidence Unit, a targeted focus on the DNA backlog and sexual assault cases, developing a secure data connection between MPD and DFS, ensuring Public Health Laboratory's baseline capabilities, increasing our public profile and developing an outreach plan, and harmonizing the grade classifications of employees that were transferred from other agencies.

Agency focus areas for FY15

Include the following: having achieved accreditation two months prior to our mandated January 1, 2014 deadline, DFS is now working to stand up the Digital Evidence Unit and prepare it for accreditation under the same international standard (ISO 17025).

Key to CSS Division's moving forward on accreditation preparations will be to transition crime scene response and services from MPD Crime Scene Investigation Division (CSID). DFS' Central Evidence Unit (CEU) is now operational and is responsible for the intake and transfer of evidence with our stakeholder agencies. DFS is now processing evidence for fingerprints and DNA in the Crime Scene Sciences Division, including vehicles. DFS is working closely with MPD on the transition plan for transferring responsibility for crime scene response in the District from sworn MPD officers to civilian DFS scientists, which is scheduled to begin at the end of the year with coverage for one shift.

As our services grow, basic performance measures will be critical for enhancing and improving the quality, timeliness, and cost-effectiveness of our services. We have established such performance measures for the three active FSL Units (DNA, Firearms, and Fingerprints). Similar performance measures are being established for the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) to assist in establishing performance goals and monitoring progress.

In meeting the District's Open Government requirements and our statutory requirements, we have established an Open Government tab on our website at DFS.dc.gov. We continue to work towards updating it on a regular basis.

Finally, two separate but distinctly important activities we look forward to embarking on are the quarterly meetings with our new Science Advisory Board, scheduled for April 18, to enhance DFS' performance and reliability; and the implementation of a laboratory information management system (or LIMS) to provide seamless accountability and tracking of evidence from receipt to return for all DFS services.

Conclusion

I would like to thank Mayor Gray and Deputy Mayor Quander and their staff for their steadfast support to the Department. I would also like to thank Chairman Mendelson for his unwavering assistance and support to the Department. I would like to thank you, Chairman Wells, the Committee, and the entire Council for the support we continue to receive.

The DFS represents a defining moment for not only the District but the entire forensic industry. This agency's creation has sent ripples of positive discussion through the forensic and scientific community about our scientific independence, our melding of forensic and public health services, and the progressive view on having DFS as a "science-first" organization. Agencies around the US and internationally are paying attention to our progress as an example of how to provide critical forensic and public health services.

We look forward to the challenges of constant improvement and enhancement of our purpose, mission, and values.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee. I am happy to answer any questions about the Mayor's FY15 budget for DFS.