
Government of the District of Columbia



Department of Forensic Sciences

Testimony of
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**FY2013-14 Department Of Forensic Sciences
Council Performance Oversight Hearing**

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

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Room 412
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Good day 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 the Department Of Forensic Sciences' FY 2013-14 Performance.

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.

Agency FY 2013-14 Performance Overview

The Department of Forensic Sciences began as a new agency on October 1, 2012, with employees, resources, and finances transitioned from both the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and the DC Department of Health (DOH). Since then, we have established the Department's Quality Assurance program, Training and Development program, the Operations program, and hired key management, including a Deputy Director, General Counsel, and Chief Operating Officer to address the more comprehensive mission and goals of the new agency. We recently issued an Annual Report on the activities of the Department, which I will summarize below.

Simply put, in just 16 months of existence, the Department of Forensic Sciences has accomplished what many individual laboratories take many years to accomplish.

- **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, interviewing hundreds of applicants for Crime Scene Scientists positions. The CSS now has 23 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.

- **Science Advisory Board:**

The SAB was officially appointed on November 26, 2013 by Mayor's Order 2013-225. We thank the Council for their confirmation. The official swearing-in and first meeting was originally scheduled for March 3, 2014 at the Consolidated Forensic Laboratory. Unfortunately, due to the inclement weather and concerns for safe travelling of our members, the meeting was cancelled. We are in the process of rescheduling and will notify the public in accordance with the Open Government requirements.

Agency focus areas for FY14

Include the following: having achieved accreditation two months prior to our mandated January 1, 2014 deadline, DFS is now working to prepare Crime Scene Sciences Division and the Digital and Evidence Unit 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.

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, 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 newly approved Science Advisory Board 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

The Department of Forensic Sciences represents a watershed moment for not only the District but the entire forensic industry. This agency's creation has sent ripples of constructive 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 the globe are paying attention to our origins and our progress as an example of how to provide critical forensic and public health services.

FY13 was an exciting and prosperous year for our agency. 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 regarding our performance as a new Department.