



**Department of Forensic Sciences
Science Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
July 20, 2018**

The Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS) Science Advisory Board meeting was called to order by board chairman Peter Marone at 9:15 a.m. Board members present included, Dr. Namandjé Bumpus, Dr. Marie Fidélia-Lambert, Mr. John Paul Jones II, Dr. Jeanne Jordan, Ms. Danielle O’Neill, Mr. Robert Thompson and Dr. Simone N. Gittelsohn participated via WebEx conferencing. A quorum was established to conduct board business and the Minutes from the May 4 meeting were presented and read.

Motion to Approve Minutes: Board Member Jordan **Seconded:** Board Member O’Neill
Motion to Approve Minutes Passed

New DFS Appointments

Joining the Public Health Laboratory as Immunology/Biology Chief, Dr. Pushker Raj brings 24 years of public health lab experience from Texas, specializing in the areas of rabies, arbovirus, HIV serology, Syphilis serology, Arbovirus serology and QuantiFERON TB serology.

Dr. Colleen Courtney joins the Public Health Laboratory as Molecular Diagnostics Chief. She earned her PhD from New York University School of Medicine in HIV phylogenetics and immunology in Cameroon and was recipient of an inaugural fellowship at the New York City Public Health Laboratory. Dr. Courtney is an American Society for Microbiology (ASM) Young Ambassador of Science.

Ms. Remi Braden has been selected to serve as DFS Public Information Officer. She served as communications director for the New Orleans Police Department and spent 10 years as television news producer in New Orleans and Houston and in London with the cable news network, CNBC.

Dr. Anthony Tran, Director of the Public Health Laboratory (PHL) and Director Jenifer Smith spoke briefly about laboratory staffing levels, PHL supports (resources, funding), demands and challenges of lab services that exist in both areas of public safety and public health, and the importance of having public health representation on the Science Advisory Board.

In response to the opioid crisis and synthetic cannabinoid use in the District, Director Smith reports that the Director of the D.C. Department of Health serves as chief coordinator of the multiple strategic measures taken on behalf of the District to combat these public health issues. It is not known if the Council of Governments has been engaged in the District’s public health campaigns.

Quality Update

- **ANAB Complaints**

Allegations in two ANAB complaints filed during the last quarter by former DFS employees were unfounded. In response to the Board’s interest in the regularity of complaints filed by former DFS employees, Deputy Director Brittany Graham indicated that the personnel performance matter that made its way into the media could have led to the former employee filing a complaint. Director Smith reassured the board that the department’s operations are conducted with transparency and feedback is regularly



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sought during exit interviews with all employees leaving the department. More recent retention efforts at the department have included a visit to the District's Human Resources Department and a review of law enforcement programs designed to attract and retain talent. However, the budgetary implications that accompany these programs cannot be overlooked.

Board Chairman Marone offered the board's collective support in the department's pursuit for supplemental resources.

- **Audits**

A CLIA re-certification audit of the Public Health Laboratory was conducted May 16-17, 2018. The audit resulted in 1 standard level deficiency, which was corrected, and the laboratory was recertified in the CLIA program June 13. An unannounced Division of Select Agents and Toxins (DSAT) verification inspection occurred July 10-11. Six minor findings were identified and correction efforts are underway. In anticipation of an ANAB on-site audit August 27-30, an internal audit of the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) was conducted June 5-6 that resulted in 3 non-conformities and 5 opportunities for improvement. The on-site August audit will consist of a reassessment of all FSL areas, including the Digital Evidence Unit (DEU), and a return to the Forensic Chemistry Unit (FCU) to potentially accredit for heroin purity.

Public Health Update

- **Rabies/Arbovirus/APHL Strategy**

Renovations of the Public Health Laboratory's (PHL) rabies lab is scheduled to commence August 1. The existing lab will be removed and relocated from the Biosafety Level-2 (BSL-2) area into the BSL-3 area. The change will facilitate improved overall safety for staff and enables the lab to have samples in-house for processing and testing, applications currently performed by the D.C. Department of Public Health at animal shelters.

The PHL has enlisted in a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) pilot project for molecular rabies testing which couple synonymously florescent anti-body testing and molecular testing that will at some time be limited to molecular testing only for rabies. The laboratory has received in 2018, to date, 125 animal brains for rabies testing, of which 63 have had human exposure and 41 having had potential human exposure (not having been documented by Health Department). The remaining 21 samples represent routine surveillances comprised of raccoons, foxes and occasionally bats. 9 of 25 raccoons represented the overall rabies positivity. For domesticated animals, the positive rate for rabies remains at zero.

Of 257 pools PHL tested during the 2018 arbovirus testing season, 13 pools (5%) tested positive for West Nile Virus. The more recent positive pool sites are new sites selected by the Department of Health and found on the National Mall. No positive pools for Zika Virus have been reported.

The PHL is embarking on a program/initiative with the CDC to help combat an infectious resistant bacteria. The laboratory has also engaged in a first time strategic planning session with the Association of Public



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Health Laboratories (APHL) during which laboratory goals, objectives and evaluation measures were identified. The projected timeline for implementation has not been announced.

Forensic Science Laboratory Update

- **Latent Fingerprint Processing and Chem Lab Overview**

Mr. Andrew Reitnauer, Technical Lead Scientist, Latent Fingerprint Unit, presented an overview of the Chem Lab's new processes, the unit's recruitment plans to fill positions, SOP development, new equipment acquisition, new reagents and the implementation of new techniques since the program's transfer from the Crime Scene Sciences Division to the Forensic Science Laboratory Division, Latent Fingerprint Unit. DFS management anticipates incorporating the LFU Chem lab processing into the 2019 accreditation cycle.

- **Digital Evidence Unit**

Ms. Tracy Walraven, Unit Manager, Forensic Science Laboratory Digital Evidence Unit (DEU), was introduced to the board and presented an overview highlighting the unit's capabilities and limitations associated with data recovery of digital and multimedia evidence. The unit's caseload of 98 in 2016 increased to 394 in 2017 and in 2018, to date, 380 cases have been docketed. A 100-150% increase over the 2017 caseload is projected.

The significance of DEU services and its contribution to crime-solving was recognized by local law enforcement with the inclusion of the unit's metrics in the Metropolitan Police Department's quarterly homicide report, TOPS. While a recent pre-assessment audit of DEU yielded 2 non-conformities involving page numbering and evidence labeling, the unit looks forward to expanding services to include enhancement of video quality after accreditation.

SAB Review of PCAST relevant to DFS Procedures

Board member Robert Thompson led the discussion of the board's response to the PCAST report as it relates to firearms. The draft document will be distributed to board members in one week.

SAB member John Paul Jones II informed the board, DFS leadership and staff of the release of a draft standard for friction ridge examination conclusions, posted on the Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science (OSAC) website. The draft standard will be sent to the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) Academy Standards Board (ASB) as part of the standard development process. A period for public comment is expected.

The board agreed to a search for candidates having expertise in digital evidence and drug evidence. There was a brief discussion regarding the next round of potential protocols and SOP reviews before the meeting adjourned at 1:43 p.m. An audio recording of the meeting is available upon request.