

Science Advisory Board Position Statement

June 2023

The Science Advisory Board (SAB) for the Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS) was appointed by the Mayor's Office to provide advice and guidance to the DFS leadership on advancing the Public Health and Forensic Science operations in support of the District of Columbia. The seven board members represent a broad range of experience and expertise that includes academia, public health and hygiene management, forensic laboratory management, forensic applied research, quality assurance, infectious disease diagnostics, epidemiology, chemistry, and technology development.

The DFS became operational in 2012. Important aspects of its creation included operating independently from law enforcement and having mandatory accreditation. The DFS has three critically important missions that contribute to the safety and well-being of the District of Columbia. They are to provide "high-quality, timely, accurate, and reliable forensic science services...[using] best practices and best available technology; a focus on unbiased science and transparency; and the goal of enhancing public safety." DFS customers include the Metropolitan Police Department, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Office of the Attorney General, Department of Health, Fire and Emergency Medical Services Department, and United States Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia.

While the SAB is strictly an advisory body, we think that the breadth and depth of SAB expertise is not being fully considered to assist the DFS and DC public. SAB advice or input has not been routinely sought or utilized to support DFS plans or priorities.

There are no regular requests for SAB input. We would welcome the opportunity to be more engaged, and encourage the DFS to utilize the wealth of SAB expertise, as appropriate. We can only help if we are asked and given the opportunity.

Examples of a few opportunities are listed below to illustrate topics where SAB input may have been or could be beneficial.

1. The SAB has not yet been consulted on key forensic rehabilitation decisions including development of new protocols and priorities in preparation for reaccreditation, despite offering suggestions to assist the DFS.
2. Recommendations from the SAB have not been sought on how to plan for and obtain national forensic reaccreditation. While the DFS has engaged consultants and reports progress toward reaccreditation, the details of those efforts have not been entirely transparent to the SAB.
3. A variety of circumstances, including forensic evidence examination failures, and how they were addressed, led to the loss of accreditation. Best practices call for a systematic reexamination of evidence to fully assess the scope of the problem and take needed corrective actions. To date, no systematic reexamination has occurred. The reanalysis

should inform future DFS procedures and actions. The SAB has had no visibility on the planning or timing for the reanalyses.

4. Returning evidence collection responsibilities to the police department was considered albeit not carried out. While clearly an executive decision, SAB input may have been informative formulating this recommendation. Similarly, hiring decisions are an executive function, but SAB input could inform position descriptions, and key personnel roles and attributes.

Existing legislation, Section 13 of the D.C. ACT 19-89 (June 2, 2011) describes the Science Advisory Board functions to include reviewing “reports of allegations of professional negligence, misconduct, or misidentification...” and “program standards and protocols...”. It also includes making recommendations to the Director, as necessary, concerning “quality...scientific programs..., plans..., and qualification standards...”.

Reaffirming the SAB responsibilities, we respectfully desire to:

- A. To work with Dr. Diaz, the new Interim Director, to discuss the SAB role, to support his vision, and to understand how he envisions the SAB assisting the DFS.
- B. To discuss mechanisms that will enable Science Advisory Board members an opportunity to better understand the new forensic procedures and how they are being implemented in the forensic lab. It is also important to understand how the NIST Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC), and other recognized standards, are being incorporated into DFS procedures. Most importantly, what processes are in place to ensure sustainability and continuous quality improvement to avoid similar evidence examination problems in the future.
- C. To provide input to key operational aspects that will include procedures for addressing self-disclosures, complaints, or allegations of testing errors.

We want to be a resource and provide the best advice possible to support the DFS. We believe such advice is rooted in sound applications of science and utilizing relevant experience. This approach can aid in reestablishing customer and stakeholder trust.

We look forward to open, meaningful dialog and opportunities to assist.

Dr. Jeanne Jordan, Chair

Dr. Tracey Dawson Green
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Mr. Eugene Lien

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Mr. Richard Tontarski
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