



**Department of Forensic Sciences
Science Advisory Board WebEx Meeting Minutes
October 16, 2020**

The Department of Forensic Sciences (DFS) Science Advisory Board (SAB) WebEx meeting was called to order by Board Chairman Peter Marone at 9:07 a.m. Roll call of Board members present, in addition to the Board Chairman, included: Ms. Marla Carroll, Mr. John P. Jones II, Dr. Jeanne Jordan, Dr. LaKeisha McClary, Ms. Danielle O'Neill, Dr. Michael Pentella and Mr. Robert Thompson. A quorum was established to conduct board business. Minutes from the July 31, 2020, meeting were presented and read.

Motion to Approve Minutes: Board Member

Seconded: Board Member

Motion to Approve Minutes Passed

Dr. Roger Mitchell, Chief Medical Examiner/Interim Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice joined the WebEx meeting, recognizing the expansive interest in the work and expressing gratitude for the support by the Science Advisory Board.

Dr. Jenifer Smith delivered the DFS Director's report that was supplemented with a year-in-review video presentation, developed by the department's communications team, which showcased exhibits, events, activities, challenges and accomplishments occurring throughout the laboratory's divisions during the past fiscal year concluding September 30, 2020. During this period, the Crime Scene Sciences division responded to 7,689 crime scenes within 30 minutes or less 87% of the time, compared to having responded to 7,987 scenes in FY 2019, within the same time frame, 84% of the time, and in FY18, 7,281 scenes 69% of the time. The Central Evidence Unit (CEU) and members of the Metropolitan Police Department's Evidence Control Branch moved more than 1,100 pieces of flammable evidence previously stored since 2013.

Laboratory Productivity

The Forensic Intelligence Unit received and processed 4,387 key stakeholder agency requests during FY 20. This represents 189 more requests than received the previous year. Having completed 4775 cases with an average turnaround time of 11 days, the Latent Fingerprint Unit has no current backlog. The Firearms Examination Unit (FEU) completed 514 cases, averaging a turnaround time of 36 days, and entered into NIBIN in 2 business days or less 63% of eligible cartridge cases. Of the 2,270 firearms FEU received in FY20, 251 were Ghost Guns, representing an increase of 198% over FY19. Over 90% of Ghost Guns recovered were handguns, 247 of the 251 recovered were operable, 12 were associated with homicide cases and 2 were fully automatic. Effective July 27, 2020, Polymer80, Inc., the leading supplier of ghost guns, voluntarily ceased shipping Ghost Guns into the District. At present, FEU has a backlog of 194 cases.

The average turnaround time for 218 Sexual Assault Kits (SAKS) received by the Forensic Biology Unit (FBU) was 74 days during FY20. There were four cases greater than 90 days, due to "permission



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to consume” delays, and currently there is no backlog of SAKS. The work of laboratory staff was applauded for having no loss of productivity despite challenges posed by the pandemic. The Digital Evidence Unit (DEU) completed 1302 requests of 1325 requests received in FY20, compared to 333 requests received and 340 requests completed in FY17. Vehicle forensics requests received in DEU are up 100% and the unit now has the capability of accessing locked iOS and Android devices.

Included among the technological improvements slated for FY21 is upgrading of JusticeTrax to a new version with web-based interface, customized modules, FileOnQ integration and mobile device integration.

Mr. Todd Smith has been confirmed DFS General Counsel.

Dr. Anthony Tran, Director of the Public Health Laboratory (PHL), announced recent new hires in the Public Health Laboratory division. Included among them is Molecular Diagnostics Chief (Dr. Jocelyn Hauser), Health and Occupational Safety Manager (Mr. Dale Jennings) and Grants Coordinator (Vicki Sussman). Dr. Colleen Courtney, former chief of Molecular and Microbiology left the PHL in August to join the Division of Consolidated Systems of Virginia’s Public Health Laboratory. Dr. Tran also reported that he will be leaving the DFS Public Health Laboratory in November of this year. During a year-in-review glimpse at PHL operations, Dr. Tran revisited a broad range of COVID-19 related activities the division faced having initially managed a paper-based system and manual extraction to achieving substantial testing capacity via evolving automation enhancements.

Dr. Luke Short reported that the Forensic Chemistry Unit’s (FCU) syringe exchange program is in progress and approximately 100 syringes are tested weekly. Collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) in the opioid treatment surveillance project, for which FCU analysis measured methadone levels and detected the presence of fentanyl/analogs, is completed. FCU reports the use of fentanyl is now more widespread with focus away from analogs. In a separate DBH collaboration, FCU received \$182,275.40 for the purchase of an Alinity-c analyzer to provide diagnostic services in drug screening.

A review of processes and procedures designed to move the Latent Fingerprint Unit closer toward implementation of a paperless laboratory was conducted by Ms. Jessica Beckman, Latent Fingerprint Unit (LFU) manager.

Forensic Biology Unit (FBU) manager, Kristy Hopkinson and Jessica Skillman, Forensic Science Specialist, conducted a presentation on recent STRmix technical notifications associated with ‘highest posterior density’ (HPD) and the integer overflow issue. A brief update of FBU standard operating procedure (SOP) edits was also reported.



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During a Quality Assurance report, Senior Deputy Director Abdel Maliky reviewed the status of QCARS across all laboratory units and reported on the Firearms Examination Unit's July 6 through July 10 interim assessment, related assessment on-site activities, interim assessment result and nonconformities and conformities. In due course, ANAB determined that issues cited had been addressed and a continuation of accreditation was granted to DFS October 1, 2020.

Ms. Beth Bustamante, Firearms Examiner and Firearms Examination Unit (FEU) Quality Coordinator, conducted a FEU documents and procedures review that included FEU's response to recommendations submitted by Board, citing FEU's decision and reason(s) to either incorporate or not incorporate the SOP recommendations.

Mr. Jonathan Fried, FEU Supervisor, presented observations, clarifications and conclusions after having conducted comprehensive document/case reviews of NIBIN verifications, chief among them involving two cartridge casings from two crime scenes for the United States Attorney's Office (USAO), D.C. A dialogue of multiple perspectives among the meeting's attendees followed the presentation.

In summary to recap document review efforts undertaken by FEU, Mr. Jonathan Pope, Firearms Examination Unit Manager, identified the disclosures (QCARS, documents) made to the SAB by FEU, improvements and changes instituted to address issues identified and revealed the unit's plan to move forward.

Dr. Mitchell encouraged the Board to conduct its' assessments and to defer to him in assisting with facilitating a conciliatory collective with DFS stakeholders.

SAB Chairman Marone requested that Board members submit to him, by the week of October 19th, a list of needs that he will compile and distribute for Board review. DFS will forward to the Chairman email addresses for all Board members and Dr. Roger Mitchell.

On behalf of the Board, Chairman Marone acknowledged that the Board is satisfied with the Firearms Examination Unit's review of protocols.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

An audio recording of the meeting is available upon request.