



Mike Hagar
SECRETARY

ARKANSAS STATE CRIME LABORATORY

LITTLE ROCK
#3 Natural Resources Drive
Little Rock AR 72205
(501) 227-5747

LOWELL
1120 West Monroe Avenue
Lowell AR 72745
(479) 365-8717

HOPE
2500 South Main Street
Hope AR 71802
(870) 722-8530



Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders
STATE OF ARKANSAS

Theodore T. Brown, M.D.
DIRECTOR

Arkansas State Crime Lab Board Meeting Minutes

January 12, 2024

Board Members Present (GoToMeeting-Virtual):

- Danny Ormand
- Brent Davis (virtual)
- Gregg Parrish
- Chief Elliott
- Dr. Rosenbaum (virtual)

Others Present:

- Director, Dr. Ted Brown
- Deputy Director, Jennifer Beaty
- Deputy Director, Sammy Williams
- Felisia Lackey
- Lauren McDonald
- Kelli Dixon
- Merianne Stinnett
- Andrea Swift
- Rebecca Mullen
- Mandi Wertenberger
- Adam Wilson
- Miranda Crawford

Welcome/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Brown. Roll call was taken, 4 members were present and a quorum was made. Motion was made to approve the October's minutes by Chief Elliott and seconded by Gregg Parrish. All were in favor, non opposed.

1. ASCL Update

A. Financial Update-Carol Hartman from DPS

- Expenditures were a little high for our general revenue funding. We are at 53% and we should be at 50% right now but we are also low in DNA Special and our equipment fund.
- We usually spend our General Revenue 1st and then we use the others as needed to supplement.
- 1VM Asset Forfeiture funding is estimated about \$124,000.00 under projection this year, so we are getting less and less. We are holding off on spending out of that so we can save it for equipment funding.
- Court filing fees are coming in at over \$90,000.00 projection this year and DNA is coming in at 49% which is where we should be.
- We are drafting a request for a proposal for the Crime Lab construction. WER is our design professional on contract so we are wanting to do an alternate delivery method for the construction where we can do a request for proposal which will allow us to pick the best qualified candidate and not the lowest bidder.
- The Crime Lab received \$350,000 in funding for postmortem toxicology testing.
- Rapid DNA, the initial equipment has been ordered for the pilot program.
- Medical Marijuana funding has been a huge assistance to the lab. We have received \$669,000 this fiscal year to supplement our general revenue.

2. Section Chiefs Reports

A. Evidence Receiving-Andrea Swift

- In 2023, we took in 26,300 cases for all labs.
- Updates for 2024, we are going to be fully staffed by February for the 1st time in six months.
- We've hired 1 new lab tech, Kim and she is doing great, and we are in the process of hiring another lab tech.

B. Physical Evidence-Mandi Wertenberger

- We have a total of 9 including myself, 1 in training and we are planning to have her training complete by spring.
- We have worked hard with our sexual assault kits processing. With the state law, we try to get the TAT down to a shared total of 60 days with DNA so that gives us about 15 in serology. With our 2 latest hires that are fully trained, we've really seen a great uptick in the number of kits we were able to process.
- At the end of 2023, we were able to get our TAT to 1 month. We do try to keep a close watch on the homicides and the non-kit sexual assaults.
- Trace has paused their GSR testing due to instrument replacement. We have a new scanning electron microscope that needs to be validated and we have had

some technical glitches with the vendor on that. We have a tech working on those issues so Ryan can begin with the validation process.

- We are doing good with our ignitable liquids cases.
- We have been able to get our backlog in SA kits down to 53 as of December 31st, which is phenomenal. We have seen an increase in the SA non-kit request.
- Once a kit is processed, if they don't get a good DNA result, we move on to clothing and other items. So that can generate more requests.
- Jennifer Beaty asked Mandi how many kits on average do you receive a month? Mandi responded by saying, it can vary anywhere from 50 to 60. So as soon as we get some back to agencies, we receive more to replace them.
- We are currently dealing with our annual rape kit inventory that is due at the end of 2023, so we always see an increase in kit submissions. Many of those will be older kits so they will be more for DNA.
- In our last board meeting I talked about trying to reach out to agencies to get status of their cases and due to feedback I was able to close 24 cases from our battery case backlog.

C. Forensic DNA-Kelli Dixon

- We had 127 unassigned SA kits with the oldest being from Oct. 2023, our current goal for SA kit is 64 a month.
- We have 4 new analysts off training who have been working as technicians for the last few months. By February 1st, they will be working as fully qualified analysts along with another analyst that has been out on medical leave. They will be back in rotation and we should see a more significant drop in backlog and get closer to our 60 day TAT.
- Our homicide cases have gone up, so we will focus heavily on them. With additional analysts, we will be able to spread them out a little better. We will be adding 2 to 3 homicide cases per rotation. With this rate, we hope to get an additional 24 to 36 cases per month worked.
- Property cases have increased which includes batteries which we have not been able to touch without request. These cases are still being outsourced to BODE.
- Upcoming in DNA, we have four additional trainees completing training, 1 by Feb. 1st and 3 by April 1, 2024. With the additional analysts, we should see a reduction in SAK and Homicide backlog.
- The final 2 trainees will complete training in August 2024 and November 2024 which gives us a total of 6 new analysts for 2024.

D. CODIS-Miranda Crawford

- In 2023, we had 10,753 Arrestee/Offender samples submitted for the year.
- We had 49 hits in 2023 and by the end of December 2023, we had 687 people that have been processed.

- We have 2 trained CODIS/DNA analysts, 1 SAKI Coordinator/Database Coordinator-Grant funded, 2 Database Coordinators, 1 CODIS/DNA analysts in training. We had 1 analyst to start in January but declined the position.
- The SAKI Grant, this is the lawfully owed collection...we are going back and collecting samples from individuals who were missed, didn't get their samples sent to us when they were charged with a felony. So far, we have received 121 samples. These are people who are currently in Department of Correction and are incarcerated. We Plan in March to start going out to probation calls and getting those who are under supervision.
- Rapid DNA, we got our instruments and working on validations. There are a lot of moving parts to this project, Idemia Software in booking stations has also been purchased. Enhancements need to be made with that to talk to Rapid instruments but that is in process and once Miranda is back from maternity leave, I will begin the process of getting everything approved by the FBI.

E. Latent Prints-Merianne Stinnett

- At the end of 2023, we worked a little over 1100 cases, latent prints-623, DNA collection-366 and ME ID's-165 and the majority were completed. This was a feat because we had positions coming and going. We did a lot of training at the end of 2023.
- We have a technician that does what we call DNA collection and she helps out DNA by opening the packaging, swab necessary evidence, repackage and move them on to the next step in DNA and those are all property cases. We were able to help get that backlog down and save them time.
- We have 561 cases pending, Latent Prints-229 and DNA Collection-332. Some of the Latent Print cases are pending Physical Evidence. Once they are done, we will get the case and process it in order.
- Our goal last year was 85 cases a month and now that everyone is trained, we are striving for 115 cases a month.

F. LR Drugs/Lowell Drugs-Lauren McDonald, Felisia Lackey and Terra Lucas

- We will start with staffing...Terra's group (Lowell Lab) is fully staffed. Celia Whelan is our newest analyst, and her training will be shortened because she came to us with 6 years of forensic experience from another laboratory that is accredited. This allowed us to transfer a fully trained analyst from Lowell to LR. We have 1 completing training in November '23, 2 analysts in training, 1 in the application phase and 2 starting in February '24.
- In December, LR cases were pending at 3900, which we haven't been under 4000 in a long time, and Lowell cases are pending at 1119 which they were lower than that, but they began helping LR with their backlog cases that were close to the northwest region. This was a huge help to the LR lab with our backlog. Currently, Lowell is at a 3-month TAT and LR is at a 4-month TAT. Our analysts

have been working hard through training new analysts and still seeing the backlog come down.

- This October, we will be hosting SWAFS conference which is exciting for us.

G. Toxicology-Jennifer Beaty presenting for Kristen Mauldin

- We are hiring for 2 positions and Bryce, DNA technician has been assisting with some of the tox cases. This is a great example of teamwork and how our sections and supervisors pool together to assist each other and each department.
- With the toxicology section being short staffed in 2022, their average TAT was 55 days and this year 2023 they are at 46 days TAT. They have been able to reduce TAT even with the short staff.
- For future improvements, we are purchasing a Q-Tof MS, which will improve our screening methods allowing us to have better identification of trending drugs. We will also be able to increase our quantitation to help provide a more thorough quant for high amounts of drugs.

H. Firearms-Rebecca Mullen

- Currently we have 7 trained examiners, including Rebecca. We just had an examiner get signed off the end of December, so she is now doing case work. We also hired an additional analyst in September and his training will take a year. Additionally, we have 1 tech leaving in January for same position in Houston forensic lab for higher pay, so we are in the process of hiring for that position.
- Since last quarter, we have been focusing on homicide cases. We currently have 4 cases from 2022 that are quite large so we will slowly work them in our cycles.
- We essentially have two categories of cases in the Firearms section. We have Firearm Cases and those are going to be mostly the comparison cases where they best fit the bullet or partial casing to a particular gun. This can also include serial number restoration and operation shutdown. Those are the cases where firearm is only submitted to be test fired and entered into Nibin database.
- Rebecca expanded on the increase in Firearm homicide cases since 2019, we have seen the numbers go from 29% to 39% in 2023 which we are focusing on.

I. Digital Evidence-Adam Wilson

- Nothing much has changed since last meeting; except we have lost one of our software solutions and we are working to get it renewed. It was basically supported by funding leftover from COVID.
- Currently we have 157 cases to be assigned. That is down a little because for 2 reasons, number 1, we have a lot of cancellations because our cases are so old and 2nd, the submission rate has come down because we are so far behind. Mobile device 119, computer devices 33 which sounds like a lot but computer cases when there's six boxes, it takes maybe 3 months working. We have 4 Digital Evidence submissions most are computers and 1 video submission which will be returned because we don't analyze video, State Police will do those cases.

- Our current TAT is about 640 days, current backlog is 155. This is due to the fact we only have 2 examiners. We would be past 2021 cases if it wasn't for rush cases. Those cases take precedent. Some rush cases turned out to be nothing there and that takes away from other cases you were already working. We also work a lot of supplementals because phones code cracks and then we can get a full file system really what they are looking for. But those are short, maybe 3 or 4 days.
- The next few months I will train Ashley on computers because Adam is the only one trained to work on computers right now. Ashley works cell phones and that is not efficient. The rush cases have consumed my time, so it is difficult to take time to train but I am going to make a concerted effort to get her trained.

J. Medical Examiner-Dr. Ted Brown

- We had a record number this year and working on getting the exact number, but we did approximately 1850 postmortem examinations and that is quite higher than the previous year and just within the last five years we're seeing a dramatic increase.
- We're moving forward to request an additional forensic pathologist.
- I am proud to share we were recognized by the Arkansas Regional Organ Recovery Agency as a donation champion and basically, we were recognized that we are a significant contributor to saving lives and over the past 15 years we were recognized specifically working with Arora and were able to successfully provide 758 organs which resulted in 681 lives.
- A big thank you to DPS communications team, Cindy Murphy who was able to share that news. I think it is important to recognize all the work that we're doing here at the crime lab. That partnership is meaningful.
- I'm proud to say that we are in full recruitment mode for our friends of Pathology fellowship program. Again, that's a training program that is a combination of efforts to each of us as well as UAMS.
- We interviewed a local candidate and Colonel Hager, Secretary of DPS was able to give us his time to chat with the candidate and myself. That was greatly appreciated.
- Another strong candidate will be applying to join us after completing not only pathology residency program, but also a pediatric fellowship program. That additional expertise will be huge for us as we continue to grow and expand and deliver excellent forensic science services.

New Business

- Dr. Brown emphasized his gratitude to Col. Hager and Hugh and one of the big things he wants to focus on this year is developing meaningful relationships.
- One of the relationships Dr. Brown expanded on was between us and Tom Fisher and the fusion center idea. We want to be as responsive as possible when an individual dies of a suspected drug overdose. How can we be best positioned to

prove the information regarding the cause and manner of death for all deaths but also include drug related deaths and getting all the stakeholders around the table to adequately investigate deaths is important. By having these relationships in place helps us go a long way.

- Dr. Brown went on to explain, part of those relationships include the Attorney General's Office. We needed some additional funding assistance to improve our toxicology testing and with the help of Col Hager, were able to sit with Attorney General, Tim Griffin and he was kind enough to support our initiatives moving forward to improve our toxicology testing.
- Dr. Brown shared how proud he is to work with everyone at the lab and has learned a lot by meeting with each section. One of the biggest feedback he has received from each section is that it matters when the Directors show up.
- One of the things we are advocating for is a new pay plan and career development pathway for current and future employees. We are working closely with Col Hager, Hugh Finkelstein, their team and the Governor's Office to hopefully position ourselves to really develop and create a meaningful career paths.
- We received an update for the architect firm, and we will be meeting with them soon and Hugh Finkelstein is getting approval to purchase 19 acres at the North Shore Business Park. Once that is resolved we will be able to start with the planning and design phase. We are involving each section in the designing phase of each section.
- We will have a kickoff meeting on January 24, and then a 3 day intensive on-site meeting on January 30th-Feb. 1st with the architects who will meet with each section.
- The floor was opened for questions
 - o Dr. Rosenbaum commented, I love the moving forward with the possibility of a new site that is long time coming. Great news.
 - o Chief Elliott followed by saying, thank you for the work we do and wanted us to know that he appreciates our efforts that we do, and our recruiting has come a long way from where it has been in the past few years. Hopefully the trend and the new building is a place that is nice and built for the future and not for today or we can't grow over the next 20-30 years. So proud to be a part of the board and look forward to getting things done.
 - o Col. Hager agreed with Chief Elliott's comments and added that the greatest blessing that has come with this role and DPS and full transparency. My background is in law enforcement and I could not be more grateful for the opportunity because it's giving me a chance to see what the agencies do.
- Motion was made to adjourn by Chief Elliott and seconded by Gregg Parrish.

