



Mike Hagar  
**SECRETARY**

# ARKANSAS STATE CRIME LABORATORY

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Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders  
**STATE OF ARKANSAS**

Theodore T. Brown, M.D.  
**DIRECTOR**

## Arkansas State Crime Lab Board Meeting Minutes

April 12, 2024

### Board Members Present (GoToMeeting-Virtual):

- Chuck Grahm
- Gregg Parrish
- Sheriff Rodney Wright
- Chief Rick Elliott
- Hon. Judge Brent Davis

### Others Present:

- Director, Dr. Ted Brown
- Deputy Director, Jennifer Beaty
- Deputy Director, Sammy Williams

### Welcome/Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Brown. Roll call was taken, 5 members were present and a quorum was made. Motion was made to approve the January minutes by Dr. Brown and all were in favor non-opposed.

### I. ASCL Update

#### A. Financial Update-Carol Hartman from DPS

- New building update: The Attorney General's Office is reviewing the title commitment. We plan to close within the next few weeks.
- WER is under contract as our design professional, and we are negotiating with Nabholz for the construction.
- Our General Revenue is holding at a good percentage this year.
- We received additional Medical Marijuana funding.

- Asset Forfeiture money and DNA Special Revenue collection fees are lower than projected. However, the filing fees, court filing fees are ahead of projection.

## 2. **Section Chiefs Reports**

### A. Evidence Receiving-Andrea Swift

- We are fully staffed with 4 Forensic Techs and 1 Laboratory Tech.

### B. Physical Evidence-Mandi Wertenberger

- We have had some setbacks with instruments being down. This has affected Trace being able to do case work. However, we are working with the vendor to get this resolved.
- Back in October 2023 to the end of March 2024, Serology was only down to 29 kits statewide that had not been processed.
- A big success story for Serology is they were able to hit our 15-day (out of the shared 60 day) TAT with DNA.
- Dr. Brown added the He, Sammy and Jenn had the opportunity to speak with the legislators. There were questions about our commitment to the TAT and we were fortunate to be able to answer the legislators with look what our team is doing and the progress they have made and continue to make.

### C. DNA-Kelli Dixon

- The Sexual Assault kits are reducing. DNA has 166 unassigned SA Kit cases. Currently, we have more people on staff working these cases which increased our numbers from January to April.
- Our goal is to be at a 60-day TAT with Serology by the end of the year.
- Kelli expanded on technology issues that has stalled them on testing SA Kits.
- DNA has increased their homicide cases to help with upcoming court. This helped us to be able to decrease our numbers in homicide cases significantly.
- We were able to close out several cases that were adjudicated.
- Property cases are still being outsourced to BODE and they are turning them around quickly.
- We currently have 2 additional trainees one that will be complete by August and the other will be complete by November. We just lost an analyst to CODIS but she will still assist DNA.
- Our DNA section just went under FBI QAS Audit and had no findings. We are excited about that.

### D. CODIS-Jennifer Beaty

- Department is currently stable with staffing.
- 124 CODIS hits and a 225 sample backlog which for the CODIS section, is not a significant backlog.
- CODIS also went under the FBI QAS audit through external auditors with no findings.

- Updates with our Rapid DNA and SAKI program, we have a grant where we are going through and collecting locally owed samples from convicted offender and arrestees. We have started collecting samples from July 2023 with the focus on sexual assault offenders.
- We had a national hit to an unsolved rape in Ohio from this program. Unfortunately, the victim has passed away, but Ohio is still actively investigating this case.
- Anyone that is in custody of the Department of Corrections, we've been able to identify and collect those samples.
- CODIS is now working on identifying people that are active, parole probation offenders and start collecting those samples.
- We have received the rapid instruments. Saline County and Faulkner County has received their funding through the community grants program.
- The IDEMIA software that allows the fingerprints and DNA notification flagging of DNA the upgrades are in process.
- There are some FBI standards that dictate how to use the Rapid DNA coming out the first of 2025, so our goal is to have everything validated and ready to go by then.

E. Friction Ridge-Leslie Barker

- Latent Prints has been renamed to Friction Ridge.
- In quarter one, we had 239 cases submitted and our goal was to complete 345 and we completed 340.
- We are fully staffed and fully trained as of quarter two.
- We have started entering more prints into the NGI database which was not previously done. We saved NGI solely for crimes against persons in effort to resolve unidentified latent to close more cases. We now have the manpower to enter all prints that are suitable to go into a federal database.
- Our cases pending analysis, we're down 561 first quarter, 427 total. 185 for latent prints and 239 DNA collection.
- Our TAT for crime against person is worked within 30 days.
- Our goal is to get our Property Crimes cases TAT to 30 days.

F. LR/Lowell Drugs-Felisia Lackey

- All positions have been filled, 3 are still in training. We have 2 new future hires coming, 1 in May and 1 in June.
- For Little Rock, our backlog reduction on target where we should be. Because of uptick in cases and training new analysts, we've slowed down some and Lowell has been able to help with cases to keep us at our predicted goal.
- Lowell is fully staffed and fully trained and operating about 4 months ahead of schedule.
- With the new drugs coming in, one of the things we're doing is adding reviewable data for one of our secondary testing techniques to our case files.

- A new class of synthetic opioids called Nitazene compound are on a rise. We are testing extraction methods for Tianeptine, which is known as “gas station heroin”. This drug has opioid effects.

#### G. Toxicology- Kristen Mauldin

- Currently we have 4 analysts, 4 in training and hiring 1 more. We are also hiring 1 additional tech.
- Right now, we want to lower our TAT. With families waiting on Death Certificates, we try to prioritize our Medical Examiners death cases.
- We’ve started outsourcing our overdose cases, which has allowed us to really focus on other cases.
- We have received and installed our newest instrument, the Q-TOF. This instrument is going to propel us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- We are working on our Blood THC validation. We need to get our quantitation where we need it to be so we can hopefully take back the overdose cases from NMS.
- We are trying to get a Liquid Handler in the future using Medical Marijuana Funding. As well as a new GCMS because the oldest one is at least 16 years old.

#### H. Firearms-Rebecca Mullen

- We currently have 7 trained examiners. We are in the process of hiring 1 examiner and 1 technician.
- Our stats right now for homicides which is currently our priority, 12-month TAT in December 2023 and 14-month TAT in April 2024.
- For non-homicide firearm comparison cases, we have a large backlog.
- Operation Shutdown has a large backlog due to not having a technician. The tech usually works these cases. Our goal is getting that down once we hire a new technician and have them fully trained.

#### I. Digital Evidence-Adam Wilson

- We are in a state of transition. We are attempting to move off our servers to backup tapes. Our server has had issues.
- Ashley is finishing up her computer training. She is working on her proficiency testing.
- We are in the process of hiring a third analyst. We have 2 great applicants that are both promising.
- Currently, we have 149 cases to be assigned, prior to that last month, we met our goal and continued for 2 months.
- We have 113 cases for mobile devices. We have 31 cases for computer devices. Those can take longer because some of those cases have several boxes and DVD’s.
- In 2024, the current TAT is about 703 days. With 2 examiners it is tough to stay ahead. But with the new analyst, that will help tremendously.
- Sammy pointed out that Digital Evidence has only had 2 examiners for several years. They used to have 3 and we wanted to make sure they had the staffing they needed.

That extra person will really make a huge difference and allow their TAT to move back in the right direction.

J. Medical Examiner-Dr. Ted Brown

- We had a record number of autopsies last year. We are on track for the first 3 months of this year to have a new record year. I anticipate to close if not more than 2000 autopsies this year.
- With the increase in autopsies, we're fortunate to get approval of 4 additional forensic technicians.
- We have had 3 excellent applicants for our Forensic Pathology Fellowship Program.
- One is currently a pathology resident at UAMS. Another is a resident at Brown University. The third applicant is a Harvard Pathology resident.
- We will find out if we get one of those applicants on May 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Dr. Brown expanded on how the new Fellowship Program that attracted 3 excellent candidates says a lot about our team and what we can offer for the future Forensic Pathology.

3. New Business

- The building update and a big shout out to Hugh for his continued leadership.
- Thanks to the partnership of a lot of people, including Karen Perry, Carol Hartman, Hugh Finkelstein, and Col. Hager that has successfully advocate for our team.
- Dr. Brown expanded on the increase in pay for education and certification differentials. This in an excellent way to help recruit and retain our highly qualified team members. We were pleased to get the legislative support.
- Ryan Black our Quality Assurance Manager shared we had a successful audit with ANAB (ANSI National Accreditation Board) in March 2024. We had 3 minor non performances, which were basically paperwork issues. Big shout out to DNA, CODIS and Friction Ridge for all their help.
- Dr. Brown shared that Ryan was nominated for DPS employee of the year. He is very deserving, and we are grateful for Ryan's leadership.
- Through the leadership of Col. Hager, we can get the support from the Attorney General's office to best position us to perform toxicology testing on suspected drug overdoses. Due to the recent law of ACT 553, all suspected drug overdoses are being referred to us for an autopsy. With the support from the AG's office, we are better positioned to get out our toxicology results more efficiently.
- We continue to meet with Tom Fisher, Arkansas Drug Director to better understand how and why people are dying from drug overdoses. We are partnering with our Drug and Toxicology section to provide the most efficient results and knowledge. This includes the potential of creating a drug overdose dashboard that can be viewed by multiple stakeholders.
- Shout out to Alex McDonald our Safety Manger for leading approximately 8 tours this year alone and has offered more educational opportunities.

- Sammy added that we are starting to see more colleges and high schools adding Forensic Science courses. Those educators are reaching out to us asking us to be involved. So that is exciting news for our future in Forensic Science.
- Dr. Brown added that we will be closing soon on the North Shore Business Park property. The Governor has approved our purchase.
- The building is going to be approximately 180,000 sq. ft. This is at least 100,000 more sq ft of what we currently have. This will allow for growth for the next 20, 30 or more years.
- Thank you, Chuck Graham, for your continued leadership as our Board President and all our board members for joining us and providing feedback.
- Gregg Parrish gave a comment that without the help of Felisia Lackey, his job would be much harder. He appreciates all she does and her quick response to his calls and emails.
- Chuck Graham made the motion to adjourn, Brent Davis seconded the motion and meeting adjourned.