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Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders
STATE OF ARKANSAS

Theodore T. Brown, M.D.
DIRECTOR

Arkansas State Crime Lab Board Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2025

Board Members Present (GoToMeeting-Virtual):

- Chief Rick Elliott
- Gregg Parrish
- Sheriff Rodney Wright (Remote)
- 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, 4 members were present and a quorum was made. The motion was made to approve October's minutes, all approved and none opposed.

ASCL Update

Financial Update-Carol Hartman, DPS

- Carol expanded on our financials for the end of 2024. We are above projections for asset forfeitures and court filing fees.
- We are a little low in DNA but it should even out.

1. Section Chief's Reports

Evidence Receiving-Andrea Swift

- We are preparing for their 1st inventory for 2025.
- Andrea expressed that her section is fully staffed in LR, Lowell and Hope locations.

Physical Evidence-Mandi Wertenberger

- Serology filled their vacant position internally which helps with our training time.
- We plan to cross-train her in our Trace Evidence Section, along with Lennon our current Serologist who should complete her GSR training in June.
- Our long-term goal for Trace Evidence is to once again have a team of 3 analysts.
- Mandi expanded on the stats for December 2024 for SA Processing kits, SA non-kit testing, Homicides, Battery and Trace.
- Mandi gave a shout out to her team for meeting their 2024 goal 8 out of 12 months.
- We were able to complete 841 SA Kits with 33 on backlog.
- Our new SEM validation is complete.

DNA-Lindsey Heflin and Kelli Dixon

- Lindsey spoke regarding the SA kits backlog. 130 at the end of December 2024 with a TAT 53 days. Non-SA kits backlog is 44 with a 74-day TAT. The holidays effected our numbers because we have some analysts out on vacation.
- In homicides, our backlog was 94 with a 9-month TAT and in Battery cases, we had 568 backlog with a 1 yr TAT.
- In 2024, DNA completed 2744 cases which 848 were SAK, 175 completed homicide cases.
- DNA currently has 3 open positions and we are reviewing applications.

Dr. Brown shared that Senator Hestor included in his opening Legislative Speech this year the fact that 2 yrs ago, our SA Kits TAT was 9 mths and now we're under 2 months TAT.

CODIS-Miranda Crawford

- Codis had 13,967 Arrestee/Offender submissions, 530 hits and 382 sample backlog in 2024. We were able to hit our 7-10 day TAT.
- An update on our SAKI Grant, we've received about 1200 samples for this grant, and we had 12 hits from those samples.
- The new FBI standards are expected in July 2025 for the Crime Scene Rapid. We are working with our 2 Pilot Agencies to get their Grant Funding released.

Friction Ridge-Merianne Stinnett

- Merianne discussed STATS for 2024. We had 1005 submission along with 176 Medical Examiner identifications.
- Our team completed 1363 cases in 2024.

Drugs-Lauren McDonald

- Lauren expanded on their staffing for the Little Rock and Lowell locations. With the staffing challenges we have experienced in the last few months, this has affected our backlog.
- We had an intern that helped develop and verify a method for Nitazene Compound testing which is a new class of Opioids that has swept the nation.
- We are currently reviewing the write up of that verification, make corrections and then we will submit to Ryan for approval.
- The intern in Lowell worked on new testing techniques for Clan Lab analysis.
- We are trying to find a way to use a digital tracking system for reference material inventory. The DEA has a lot of rules on two authentications to make sure things are maintained. We are reaching out to other labs to see how they are doing this.

Toxicology-Kristen Mauldin

- Kristen discussed current staffing in her section.
- In 2024, we received 700 less cases compared to 2023.
- We have had many ongoing challenges with our training program and instrumentation. With the challenges we have had with our instruments, this has increased our TAT numbers. We currently have the manufacturer on site helping to resolve these issues.
- We were given the green light to outsource a few more cases to help with our backlog. This will help us get back to where we need to be.

Firearms-Rebecca LoBalbo

- Rebecca gave an update on her current staffing.
- In 2024, we had 1785 OS (Operation Shutdown) case and 700 Firearms cases.
- We were a little lower in the numbers for homicide cases submitted compared to 2023. This is where our time is being prioritized.

Digital Evidence-Adam Wilson

- Adam discussed where they are on their cell phone cases and the struggles with getting them to open before they become damaged from being on charger for so long.
- Chris our newest employee is currently training in mobile devices. Once trained, he can begin helping with the mobile backlog.
- We're working on a plan for the new lab space regarding digital storage needs. This involves both local and server-based storage with a long-term tape backup solution.
- Currently, we have 80 cases to be assigned.

Medical Examiners-Dr. Brown

- We had another busy year with just under 1800 autopsies in 2024 which is the 2nd highest number of autopsies in the history of the Crime Lab.
- Some great news to share, we were the recipient of the 2024 Autism Brain Net Award.

- In 2024 working with our organ and tissue procurement agency, Arora, we had another successful year. Last year, 24 of our patients, we worked closely with Aurora to successfully donate their organs. We want to do our best because of the lives that we are able to save.
- We want to assure all our stakeholders that performing an organ donation does not impact our ability to determine a cause and manner of death.
- Out of the 24 donors, we were able to recover 65 organs that went to 61 different patients just last year.
- With the continued increase in autopsies, Doctor Lance Van Truong joins our program on July 1, 2025.
- We will begin to interview 3 applicants for our 2026 Fellowship.
- We are excited to announce that Dr. Emily Ogden will be joining our team. She has been a Forensic Pathologist for 10 yrs in Dallas. She has extensive Forensic Pathology experience and for the past 5 yrs, she was their Fellowship Program Director.

New Business-

- Updates on the new Crime Lab building, Dr. Brown shared some mockup pictures of how things will look. He showed an arial view of the front of the building.
- We just finished the design development phase.
- We're still on track for starting site work in April 2025 with construction of the building itself beginning in July.
- Dr. Brown introduced Joan Shipley as our new DPS Chief of Staff. Joan was the former Chief Legal for DPS. She is currently playing both roles until her position is filled.
- Dr. Brown expanded on the news that Governor Sander is working on a new pay plan that will impact all state employees. This is will positively impact our team across the board and we are very excited.
- We still have 1 position open on the Crime Lab's board.

Dr. Brown asked if there were any questions and Gregg Parrish said he has seen the pay plan and requested a list of current employees and their salaries. He understands the struggle of keeping employees and he is working with OPM on a career path. Having experienced analysts, it is helpful in a trial. They are solid and bulletproof. Gregg would like to help with creating a career path, so we aren't losing our analyst to higher paying jobs.

Chief Rick Elliott extended his help to speak with Legislators on our behalf.

Dr. Brown made the motion to adjourn, and Gregg Parrish seconded the motion, all approved. Meeting was adjourned.