



*American Academy of Forensic Sciences
American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors
International Association for Identification
National Association of Medical Examiners
Society of Forensic Toxicologists/ American Board of Forensic Toxicology*

March 11, 2021

The Honorable Merrick Garland
Acting Attorney General of the United States
US Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Garland:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations (CFSO) and the 20,000 forensic science practitioners that CFSO represents. Our member organizations, the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors, the International Association for Identification, the National Association of Medical Examiners, the Society of Forensic Toxicologists, and the American Board of Forensic Toxicology represent almost the entirety of the forensic science practitioner community. As such, we look forward to working with you and your staff to continue to advance forensic science and ensure that the nation's forensic science infrastructure has the appropriate resources to provide a continuous, timely and reliable product so invaluable to our nation's legal system for both identifying and convicting the guilty and exonerating the innocent.

In 2019, the National Institute of Justice published the Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices Report to Congress. That report concludes there is insufficient funding to process the ever-increasing amounts of forensic evidence. It further states "the state, county, local and tribal crime laboratories including medical examiner/coroner offices have a \$640 million deficit for normal operations, but the increase of current opioid expenditures adds another \$270 million to that cost." The report goes on to state that there must be not only an increase in funding but improvements in the personnel pipeline, the institutionalization of systems-based communication and strategic planning to address the matters of funding, current backlogs, ever increasing caseloads, workforce challenges, and continuing education.

We strongly believe that these findings require a shift in how the Department of Justice approaches forensic science. Specifically, we request that the Office of Investigative Forensic Sciences, currently residing under the National Institute of Justice, which has a law enforcement research mission, be realigned as its own program office reporting directly to the Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs. It is our belief that this will provide a robust nationally focused leadership and structure to assist in the development of a nationwide strategic plan to address the shortages laid out in the report.

On a more operational level, we request that you fund the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Act and the DNA grants at or above the funding levels in the FY21 congressional budget, and to fund adequately the cooperative agreement for the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). These programs are critically important in assisting forensic science service providers, including medical examiners and coroners to meet present demands while coping with the increasing demands for their services in supporting the criminal justice system.

The Paul Coverdell forensic science grants are the primary source of non-DNA grants to publicly-funded forensic science service providers. With the increasing introduction of new technologies in addition to the ever-increasing demands for services, laboratories must purchase new or at a minimum update present instruments, hire and train new examiners, and train existing examiners on new instruments and technologies, in addition to validating the new instruments and test methods. In order to meet the needs of the forensic science service providers, thereby supporting the needs of our nation's legal system, while remaining responsive to the needs and concerns of crime victims and their families, adequate funding is crucial.

Thank you for your consideration of these requests.

Matthew Gamette M.S., C.P.M.
CFSO Chair,
on behalf of the CFSO Board