



U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Justice Programs

Office of the Assistant Attorney General

Washington, D.C. 20531

May 11, 2021

Matthew Gamette
Chair
Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations
700 South Stratford Drive
Meridian, ID 83642

Dear Mr. Gamette:

This responds to your letter to the Attorney General dated March 11, 2021. We appreciate your organization's continued support of forensic science practitioners and the infrastructure concerns you raise.

The forensic science community has provided support, cooperation, and subject matter expertise to the Department of Justice — helping inform our approach, produce results, and address many of the complex challenges facing forensic sciences nationwide. Examples of such resources include the many forensic science programs, working groups, and grant funding opportunities that the Department has supported in recent years. These efforts, such as the Office of Justice Programs' (OJP) National Institute of Justice's (NIJ) Forensic Laboratory Needs Technology Working Group and the OJP Medicolegal Death Investigation Working Group, demonstrate our dedication to improving federal coordination, sharing knowledge, and providing a network for leaders in forensic science across the country.

OJP's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) and Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) also continue to direct attention to the needs of forensic science practitioners. BJS completed its most recent *Census of Medical Examiners and Coroners' Offices* in 2019, with the publication of results expected later this year. Soon BJS will also begin collecting data for the *Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories* — a key source of data on the workload, staffing, and resources of crime laboratories nationwide. In 2020, BJA awarded over \$160 million in forensic science support through programs such as the DNA Capacity Enhancement for Backlog Reduction, Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants, and the National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative. BJA also supports the Strengthening the Medical Examiner-Coroner System Program, which made 15 awards in 14 states last year, including forensic pathology fellowships and activities that support the accreditation of both medical examiners and coroners' offices.

BJA also administers the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program, providing assistance to develop comprehensive efforts to identify, respond to, treat, and support those affected by drugs of abuse. The forensic science community is eligible to

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participate in this program and can play an important role in its focus for strengthening the collection and sharing of data across systems to understand and address the impact of illicit substance use and misuse. To strengthen the forensic science response to emerging drug issues, BJA recently partnered with the NIJ Forensic Technology Center of Excellence. This partnership should provide OJP and the field with additional resources to address needs associated with opioids and stimulants.

The Department also produces research, guidance, and best practices that support state and local forensic science. Your letter highlights conclusions from NIJ's *2019 Report to Congress: Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices* that not only identify the many challenges facing forensic science providers but proffer promising practices to address ongoing needs.

In support of forensic scientists and their significant contributions as part of the criminal justice community, we will not only continue to prioritize coordination and collaboration on forensic science within the Department, but also across federal, state, local, and tribal entities. Your letter is well received, and the ideas you present concerning federal funding and restructuring will be considered.

NIJ's Office of Investigative and Forensic Sciences (OIFS) serves as the federal government's lead agency for forensic science research and development. In addition to researching new technologies and transitioning innovative solutions into crime laboratories, OIFS facilitates timely working groups, develops best practice guides, and publishes reports that transfer knowledge back to the practitioner community. OIFS also serves to provide rigorous, objective, evidence-based analysis and practical policy recommendations to advance the practice of forensic science. The infrastructure and independence provided by NIJ allows OIFS to adopt NIJ's listen, learn, and inform approach in facilitating broad cooperation and coordination between federal, state, and local entities. Furthermore, with forensic capacity programs transferred to BJA and the appointment of a new Office Director, OIFS is committed to focusing on its principal mission of advancing innovative, evidence-based forensic science research.

Innovation and collaboration are essential to the Department. OJP stands ready to research and report on the current state of operations, transition new technologies, and provide grant-funded capacity, training, and technical assistance to advance the field. The Department looks forward to working with the executive branch and Congress to review and align appropriations to address the forensic science community's ever-changing needs.

We hope this information is helpful. We welcome a meeting to discuss the matters raised in your letter so that we may continue this dialog and collaborate on improved services to the field.

Sincerely,



Maureen A. Henneberg
Acting Assistant Attorney General