



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

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October 24, 2022

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

Dear General Garland,

We are writing to provide you and your staff an update on the status of the forensic science enterprise and request that you consider some critical needs facing our community while you develop the FY24 budget.

As you know, the NIJ conducted the “Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices” in 2019. In short, it advised that a 2017 analysis of a subset of publicly funded, accredited forensic science service provider laboratories’ workloads and expenditures projected that forensic science providers nationwide would require an additional \$640 million annually to reach an optimal balance of incoming laboratory requests and casework reported and that “sufficient and consistent funding and strategic planning to address medical examiner and coroner workforce and workload challenges” was necessary. Regrettably, the situation has gotten much worse since the publication of this document due to the escalating opioid crisis, the effects of the pandemic on the forensic community, along with an ever-increasing demand for forensic science services, yet funding has not increased.

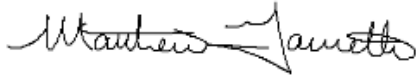
The Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations (CFSO), representing its 22,000 members, has worked with its member organizations (the American Society of Crime Lab Directors, the American Academy of Forensic Science, the International Association for Identification, the National Association of Medical Examiners, the Society of Forensic Toxicologists, the American Board of Toxicologists and the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners) to develop our most critical priorities for FY24. They are as follows:

- 1) **GRANT FUNDING:** Our nation’s crime labs and medical examiner/coroner offices have had an extraordinary increase in casework. In 2021, The National Institute of Justice and West Virginia University Project FORESIGHT provided data that there has been an increase in backlogs from 2013 to 2020 in blood alcohol by 190%, crime scene investigation by 628.5%, fingerprints by 88.5%, toxicology by 110%, and firearms cases increased by as much as 166%. However, the amount of federal funding has remained unchanged over the past several years. Accidental drug intoxication deaths have increased to over 100,000 per year (nearly doubling over 3 years). As such we respectfully request the Department to consider:
  - a. Fully funding the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Grants at \$50 million as recommended by CFSO to Congress.
  - b. Providing funding for state, county, and local forensic science service providers to procure and validate equipment to conduct genetic genealogy searches when necessary.
  - c. Fully funding NamUs and grants for forensic science laboratories and medical examiner and coroner offices for work needed pursuant to that program.

- 2) **INCREASED ASSISTANCE WITH TRAINING AND EDUCATION:** States are overwhelmed with an increased workload and with the lack of resources to train new staff. CFSO is appealing to the Department for an increase in the role of federal law enforcement agencies in assisting the state, county, and local agencies with the required education and training. We also request increased funding and opportunities for publicly funded laboratory collaboratives to set up regional and national training programs.
- 3) **WORKFORCE ISSUES:** There are numerous workforce issues within the forensic science provider community, such as hiring firearms examiners. However, the workforce shortage in the Medical Examiner/Coroner field is at an all-time crisis level. The continued funding of the medical examiner/coroner workforce grants is critical, but we also strongly urge you to increase this program and work with CFSO to reach out to universities and medical schools to encourage students to enter the field of forensic medicine. We would also request that you include forensic science practitioners in the DOJ mental health assistance program as the increased workload and the nature of the work takes a toll on our field.
- 4) **RESEARCH AGENDA:** Forensic Science continues to advance at a rapid pace, and in part that is due to the Department of Justice's prioritization of this work. We encourage the Department to focus on the following fields in your upcoming granting cycle, as they are the most critical to our community at this time: pattern recognition (e.g., tool marks, fingerprints, footwear/tiretrack, bloodstain analysis, bitemarks), hair and fiber analysis, Forensic Genetic Genealogy for Investigations, and advanced technologies (rapid DNA, next generation sequencing, and others).
- 5) **INTEROPERABILITY ASSISTANCE:** The matter of interoperability among databases in the forensic science community has long been one that we have wrestled with. CFSO has repeatedly asked for assistance from NIJ regarding this issue. There are numerous studies that have made recommendations regarding solving this all-important issue. Regrettably, few of those recommendations have been implemented. We ask that the Department of Justice institute a requirement that ABIS/MBIS systems purchased with federal funding be interoperable using national minimum standards and that you work with the Department of Commerce's NIST to develop those minimum standards.

The 2019 NIJ Needs Assessment was accurate in that the forensic science community requires more funding and assistance from the Federal government. That report, however, was conducted in 2018 and published in 2019. Since then, our country has suffered from a pandemic and an ongoing fentanyl crisis, which continues to plague our nation. Our forensic service providers and forensic medicine providers are on the frontline of this crisis every single day, yet our resources remain almost unchanged from what they were in 2018. Our Board of Directors will be in Washington on November 7, 2022, for a meeting with the new Director of the National Institute of Justice. We respectfully request a meeting with you or your staff to discuss these critical issues facing our community and the stakeholders we serve.

Respectfully,



Matthew Gamette M.S., C.P.M.  
CFSO Chair



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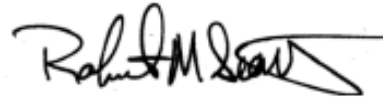
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