



*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*

March 13, 2024

Bureau of Justice Statistics Listening Session March 2024

The Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations is a collaborative of the leading forensic science organizations in the United States representing over 21,000 forensic science practitioners including virtually all forensic science laboratory, medical examiner office, and coroner office leaders. We are writing to respectfully request a meeting with you and the appropriate staff in your organization.

CFSO was pleased to be invited to the planning meeting for the Bureau of Justice Assistance Census of Publicly Funded Crime Laboratories. It is vital that this planning include forensic laboratory leaders, managers, and statistical experts so that the data is truly reflective of the forensic practitioner community. We appreciate BJS including leaders from CFSO organizations at this event. We have highlighted several important topics of interest we would like to address at the meeting and considered for Census activity.

- 1) **TIMELINESS:** The Census data must be available in a timelier manner, if the data is going to be useful to forensic science service providers and policymakers. CFSO recommends finding ways to reduce the time to conduct the Census, the internal review of the data, and publication. CFSO has previously and will continue to help advertise and follow-up on the Census with forensic science service providers to increase participation.
- 2) **DISTRIBUTION:** The Census must be distributed to more publicly funded laboratories. CFSO has worked with our member organizations ASCLD, AAFS, and IAI to identify more laboratories that should be included in this research. These lists and contact information will be provided to BJS. In general, CFSO recommends expanding the number of forensic science service providers in the Census, especially with a focus on smaller laboratories. The definition of a forensic science service provider recommended by CFSO is: *“an eligible forensic science service provider is a publicly funded state, county, or unit of local government agency having not fewer than 1 full-time analyst, who examines physical evidence in criminal or investigative matters and provides reports or opinion testimony with respect to such evidence in courts of law in the United States.”*
- 3) **DATA DASHBOARDING TECHNOLOGY:** CFSO requests that BJS focus on the publication of real-time web-based dashboarding tools for data presentation. The value added by stakeholders being able to query and view the data to answer their own questions is immense. Creating “hot maps” where forensic services are available, the particular services provided, where backlogs exist, and even where labs are located would be dramatic improvements for the utility of the data. Examples in the criminal justice field would include the BJS sponsored NCVS dashboard <https://ncvs.bjs.ojp.gov/> and the Idaho State Police Statistical Analysis Center Dashboards <https://isp.idaho.gov/pgr/sac/dashboards/>
- 4) **TERMINOLOGY/DATA FOCUS:** Forensic science leaders are transitioning from a dated and unhelpful definition of a backlog to putting the focus more on expected and necessary turnaround times. CFSO would like to see the Census focus on what turnaround times are needed for the various disciplines so that resource needs can be truly understood. Defining a backlogged case in every discipline as 30 days is counterproductive if the actual need for the analysis is 15 days. Adding questions and discussion in the Census about expected turnaround times could fuel some very important discussion in the report regarding this important topic.
- 5) **UNDERSTANDING WORKFLOW:** The US Supreme Court is in the process of making a ruling on Smith v. Arizona. This case will undoubtedly foundationally shape the practice of forensic science in the United States. If this BJS Census included questions such as how frequently labs are working cases with multiple analysts and how often retired or separated analysts are called back to court, it could help policy makers and funding entities decide how to best navigate the decision that will be made by U.S. courts related to the confrontation clause. Understanding the current use of substitute witnesses by forensic science providers could help inform best practices and budget considerations going forward from this court decision.

We look forward discussing these important topics.

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