



*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*

Strengthening America's Forensic Science Infrastructure

The Problem:

Forensic science is an essential component of the nation's public safety and criminal justice infrastructure. Crime laboratories and medical examiner/coroner (ME/C) offices provide the scientific evidence that supports criminal investigations, informs court proceedings, identifies victims, determines causes of death, and exonerates the innocent. Yet these critical public institutions continue to operate under increasing demand and constrained resources.

The National Institute of Justice's Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices, mandated by the Justice for All Reauthorization Act of 2016, identified a significant national funding gap and established a roadmap for strengthening the forensic science enterprise. Implementing its recommendations will improve the timeliness, quality, and reliability of forensic services while enhancing public confidence in the justice system.

The Need:

The NIJ Needs Assessment found:

- **\$640 million** is needed annually to support baseline operations of state, local, county, and tribal forensic laboratories and ME/C offices.
- The opioid epidemic adds an estimated **\$270 million** annually in forensic costs.
- The nation requires up to **2,000 additional board-certified forensic pathologists** and more than **900 additional forensic laboratory professionals** to meet current caseloads.
- Persistent workforce shortages and evidence backlogs delay investigations, prosecutions, death investigations, and the delivery of justice.

Without sustained federal investment, these challenges will continue to affect law enforcement, prosecutors, defense counsel, courts, victims, and communities nationwide.

Federal Priorities:

Congress and the Department of Justice should prioritize investments that:

Provide Stable Federal Funding

- Expand laboratory and ME/C operational capacity.
- Reduce evidence backlogs and turnaround times.
- Modernize equipment, facilities, and technology.

Strengthen the Forensic Workforce

- Support recruitment, education, certification, and retention.
- Expand the pipeline of forensic scientists and forensic pathologists.
- Invest in continuing education and professional development.

Modernize Case Coordination

- Improve communication among laboratories, law enforcement, prosecutors, defense counsel, and courts.
- Enhance evidence management, case tracking, and data-sharing systems.

Advance Scientific Quality

- Support accreditation and quality management systems and reduce preventable non-conformities.
 - Strengthen quality assurance programs, increase dedicated quality assurance staff, and promote workforce resilience and wellness.
 - Promote nationally recognized scientific standards and continuous improvement.
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Expected Outcomes:

Targeted federal investment will produce measurable improvements by:

- Reducing forensic evidence backlogs.
 - Accelerating criminal investigations and judicial proceedings.
 - Improving the accuracy and reliability of forensic evidence.
 - Increasing access to high-quality forensic services across all jurisdictions.
 - Strengthening public confidence in the criminal justice system.
 - Ensuring that offenders are held accountable, innocent individuals are exonerated, and victims receive timely justice.
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Policy Recommendation:

The Department of Justice should work with Congress to translate the NIJ Needs Assessment into a long-term federal investment strategy that provides sustained funding, strengthens the forensic workforce, modernizes forensic operations, and supports quality assurance across the nation's forensic laboratories and medical examiner/coroner offices.

Investing in forensic science is an investment in public safety, due process, scientific integrity, and the effective administration of justice.

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