



**CONSORTIUM OF FORENSIC SCIENCE
ORGANIZATIONS (CFSO)**

FLASH BRIEF

AUGUST 2020

The mission of the CFSO is to speak with a single forensic science voice in matters of mutual interest to its member organizations, to influence public policy at the national level, and to make a compelling case for greater federal funding for public crime laboratories and medical examiner offices. The primary focus of the CFSO is local, state, and national policymakers, as well as the United States Congress.

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National Forensic Science Week September 20-26, 2020

As we approach Forensic Science Week 2020, we have to have again worked with Congress to officially recognize that week as a day to celebrate the achievements of our practitioners and the advancements in our field. This is an important recognition of the week where Congress officially endorses the week and supports forensic science practitioners. Senator Crapo (R-ID) will re-introduce the bill again this year and he is looking for other Senators to co-sponsor the bill with him so that it can move quickly through the Congress. We are asking that you contact your Senators and ask them to "co-sponsor Senator Crapo's resolution supporting FS week." Have your Senator email Rebecca Alcorn at Senator Crapo's office Rebecca_alcorn@crapo.senate.gov While you are contacting them, take the opportunity to invite them to visit your lab for National Forensic Science Week or some other time (and let us know if they take you up on the offer). CFSO will be providing information packets for you to brief legislators. Ideas for NFSW include:

- Doing something nice for the forensic staff (luncheon, speaker, recognition)
- Hosting state and federal legislators on tours and providing information to them
- Engaging the public on tours, public presentations or speakers, or other events

NIST Studies

Digital Evidence

As many of you know, NIST has been undertaking a series of Scientific Foundation Studies for various forensic disciplines. As part of the studies, they have been conducting inter-laboratory comparisons (black box studies). The latest is in digital forensics. The study was released in June and they already have almost 500 people who have registered to participate. Responses are encouraged from federal, state, county, and local digital forensic labs. Black box studies are an important mechanisms for showing that forensic disciplines are firmly grounded in science and performing in keeping with public expectations. A link to the press release about the study can be found at this link: <https://www.nist.gov/news-events/news/2020/06/nist-digital-forensics-experts-show-us-what-you-got>

You can also go directly to the study through this link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfWjFV0RwRm1eoaHpuYlnMA-0-T39RSJ_jppU5vj4QO5qPoJg/viewform

CannaQAP

The Cannabis Quality Assurance Program ([CannaQAP](#)), part of the NIST larger [Cannabis program](#), will help forensic laboratories demonstrate and improve the comparability and/or competence of the quantitative measurements required under the 2018 Farm Bill.

Exercise 1 will focus on the determination of cannabinoids in hemp oils. Participants may elect to measure up to 17 selected cannabinoids as well as total THC and total CBD. **NIST invites forensic labs to [sign up](#) now for Exercise 1 of CannaQAP. Registration for the study closes August 31, 2020**

Future exercises will involve plant-based materials, edibles, and other sample types with complex matrices.

Participating forensic laboratories can utilize this trusted tool to: 1) Obtain reliable quality control samples to evaluate an individual laboratory's performance and provide data that can be used in the validation of its measurement capabilities or, 2) use their results to demonstrate their laboratory's capabilities.

You can read more about this program in a recent news release: [NIST to Help Labs Achieve Accurate THC, CBD Measurements](#)

NIST OSAC

Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science (OSAC) Public Update

The Organization of Scientific Area Committees for Forensic Science (OSAC) Public Update Meeting will take place virtually on September 30, 2020.

The OSAC works to strengthen the nation's use of forensic science by facilitating the development of scientifically sound forensic science standards and by promoting the use of those standards by the forensic science community.

This event will include presentations on activity updates, including the latest standards actions, research gaps, challenges being addressed, and priorities for the upcoming year. Attendees will be offered an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback. All presentations and questions from the audience will be available for future on-demand viewing. For more information including registration and agenda, please click [here](#).

Department of Justice Updates

BJA Grants

The Bureau of Justice Assistance has now taken over the responsibility for many forensic science grants. CFSO has been very active with BJA administrators to discuss issues of concern to forensic science practitioners. Of particular concern was ensuring that forensic science practitioners would get access to the Coverdell and CEFR DNA grant funds earlier in the fiscal year to assist states with a July-June fiscal year. BJA has notified CFSO that they intend to release the CEFR and Coverdell funds as close to October 1st as possible, even with the delay in the CEFR solicitation. They have indicated that even if there is a continuing resolution this year, they intend to release the funds to states on that October timeline. CFSO appreciates the efforts of BJA to speed up this timeline to give grantees an additional 3 months in the state fiscal year to spend the grant funding. CFSO has been meeting with BJA officials regularly to discuss the grant transitions from NIJ, and plans to continue to do so in the future. Please let us know if you have concerns with the solicitations this year or other grant issues. Again, we appreciate the willingness of BJA officials to work to make these grants even more effective for the grantees.

BJA SAKI

The 5th Annual National Sexual Assault Kit Initiative (SAKI) Grantees Meeting will be held **virtually** on September 16-18, 2020. This year's meeting will cover topics such as forensic genetic genealogy, lawfully owed DNA, partially tested SAKs, identifying and investigating serial offenders, prosecutorial challenges, building sustainable victim services, and more.

With the overwhelming interest in ViCAP shown at last year's National Meeting, BJA and the SAKI TTA Team have decided to add a 1/2 day workshop on the third day of the event specifically for individuals who are entering cases in ViCAP. This training session will be provided by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

NIJ

Watch for many of the NIJ grant awards for this year solicitations will be announced on October 1, 2020.

NIJ FLN-TWG Update

The FLN-TWG met on May 19-20th. There was a follow-up meeting on July 27-28th. CFSO has a heavy representation at the FLN-TWG meetings to provide feedback to DOJ and receive information briefings from them. During the meeting, there was a discussion about the newly revised, approved, and posted Uniform Language in Testimony and Reports (ULTR) documents used by the DOJ federal laboratories. CFSO encourages forensic science service providers and practitioners to review these documents and consider the applicability for implementation in state, county, and local laboratories. The link to these documents can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/olp/uniform-language-testimony-and-reports>

NIJ FTCoE Update

It is good to be reminded in this time where it is not easy to get together in person, NIJ FTCoE has provided some amazing online resources. Every FTCoE webinar/online resource is getting more hits. Here are some recent webinars/podcasts related to forensics and specifically digital forensics:

<https://forensiccoe.org/>

<https://forensiccoe.org/webinar/digital-forensics-laboratory/>

<https://forensiccoe.org/webinar/network-forensics/>

<https://forensiccoe.org/just-science-podcast/>

ASCLD Accreditation Initiative

In conjunction with NIJ and FTCoE, ASCLD is providing a free program with free mentorship to laboratories with a desire to become accredited. ASCLD has already successfully navigated several laboratories to accreditation and is currently seeking several labs to fill the 2020 cohort. ASCLD received funding to help up to 10 labs this year in a process that takes about 18 months to make accreditation application. The funding is to support labs seeking US domestic forensic laboratory accreditation. If you are with a lab that would like to be accredited or know of one that might have interest, please contact the ASCLD Executive Director John Byrd or click on the following link <https://www.asclد.org/accreditation-initiative/>

Bureau of Justice Statistics

The U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) is preparing to conduct the fifth Census of Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories (CPFFCL). This survey was last conducted in 2014 and is designed to gather data on current services offered by publicly funded crime laboratories and the challenges you face. CFSO has participated heavily in the development process of this instrument, and we are excited to see our membership provide an overwhelming response rate. This data helps in many ways, but specifically helps CFSO discuss our resources needs with Congress. Watch for the survey coming soon from BJS and RTI international. There is a specific need on this census for digital forensics labs to respond.

COVID-19 Bill

The House and Senate have failed to reach agreement on a new coronavirus bill. As a result, the President has signed Executive Orders to address some, not all, of the matters that many would like addressed as the coronavirus continues to affect our nation. Each bill is essentially an emergency appropriations bill that would put funding into federal agencies to assist in the Coronavirus response-note this includes federal funding to state and local governments. The House Hero's Act had a figure of \$3 trillion attached to it and the Senate bill \$306 billion. Attached are the sections by sections from each of the committees providing high-level detail of the bills. The White House Executive Orders addresses Student Loan Payments, Renter and Homeowner assistance, Payroll Tax, and Unemployment Compensation and the link to each is below.

The Congress has recessed for the month of August but most hope they can reach agreement when they return. In the meantime, the House has completed its appropriations bills but the Senate has not. A continuing resolution looks likely for FY21.

The White House Executive Orders: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/>

Summary:

- The President has directed the Treasury to defer the Social Security portion of the payroll tax (6.2%) for employees whose wages are less than \$4,000 for a biweekly pay period. The deferral period is September 1 through December 31, 2020 and explore avenues, including legislation, to eliminate the obligation to pay deferred taxes.
- Provides states access to up to \$44 billion in funding from FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) to continue enhanced unemployment benefits at \$400/week.
 - States must provide a 25% match to draw down DRF funds and may use their Coronavirus Relief funds (CRF) for this purpose. (Note: federal funds will cover \$300 and state funds will cover \$100 for a total of \$400/week per claimant, in addition to their state weekly benefit amount.)
 - Supplemental benefits are retroactive to August 1 and available for weeks of unemployment ending no later than December 6, 2020 or until funds from the DRF have been depleted to a level of \$25 billion.
 - Remaining DRF funds will be preserved to support costs associated with any potential 2020 disaster and recovery efforts. Currently, the DRF has a balance of approximately \$69 billion.
 - Calls on states to use amounts allocated to them out of the CRF to provide temporary enhanced financial support to those whose jobs or wages have been adversely affected by COVID-19.
- Continued student loan payment relief.
- A continued moratorium on evictions.

The House HEROS Act:

<https://appropriations.house.gov/sites/democrats.appropriations.house.gov/files/documents/Heroes%20Act%20Summary.pdf>

The Senate HEALS Act:

<https://www.appropriations.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Phase%20IV%20-%20FINAL.pdf>