

NATIONAL FORENSIC SCIENCE WEEK REVIEW

SEPTEMBER 20-26, 2026



National Forensic Science Week, held September 20th–26th, 2026, marked its 14th anniversary of recognizing and promoting the forensic sciences. National Forensic Science Week is a partnership of the **Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations** including the 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 and American Board of Forensic Toxicology, and other collaborating organization members the Major Cities Chiefs, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Association of State Criminal Investigating Agencies, Major County Sheriffs of America, Florida International University Global Forensic and Justice Center, and the Forensic Technology Center of Excellence.

Many of the national events of the week and national awards are coordinated by a multidisciplinary group facilitated by the CFSO. The week brings together forensic professionals, educators and community members, as well as government leaders, to raise awareness of the field and recognize the great work being done by experts across the country. Throughout the week, activities included webinars from the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and National Technology Validation and Implementation Collaborative (NTVIC), community events and educational programs held across the country, and the recognition of this year's National Forensic Science Educators of the Year. The week also brought attention to three newly introduced federal legislative initiatives addressing issues of importance to forensic science, including the national sexual assault kit backlog, forensic workforce shortages, and support for NFSW.

Backlog Justice Act of 2026

Introduced by Representatives Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO) and Ann Wagner (R-MO), the *Backlog Justice Act of 2026* is a bipartisan bill aimed at addressing the national backlog of untested sexual assault kits. Key provisions include a National Sexual Assault Database with anonymized online SAK inventories; funding for training state and local forensic practitioners; funding for validation and technology transfer to provide technical assistance to forensic practitioners; and increased funding and expansion of STOP VAWA grants.

“The Backlog Justice Act will create a tracking system to ensure states fully understand the extent of their backlog so we can deploy resources in the areas that need it most.”

— **Rep. Wagner**

“By leveraging the coordination and capacity-building powers of the federal government, the Backlog Justice Act is a step towards addressing this vital issue, bringing justice to victims, and keeping our communities safe”

— **Rep. Cleaver**

Strengthening the Medical Examiner Act

Introduced by Congressman Guest (R-MS) and Congressman Cleaver (D-MO), the *Strengthening the Medical Examiner Act* is a bipartisan bill aimed at addressing the shortage of forensic medicine service providers. Key provisions include grants for forensic pathology fellowships, with at least \$7 million allocated to fund at least 40 fellowships; at least \$3 million for training and continuing education for medicolegal death investigators; and at least \$3 million for education and training in pharmacology, advanced and emerging toxicological methods, and instrumentation for forensic toxicologists.

National Forensic Science Week Resolution

Introduced by Senators Crapo (R-ID), Welch (D-VT) and Risch (R-ID), the National Forensic Science Week Resolution recognizes and supports the goals and ideals of National Forensic Science Week. The resolution highlights the role of forensic science service providers in the criminal justice system and encourages forensic laboratories, policymakers, members of the media, law enforcement and the public to participate in community events, laboratory tours and discussions about the operational and legislative needs of forensic science laboratories.



2026
SENATOR JOHN CORNYN III
NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL
FORENSIC SCIENCE
EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD



Ms. Kerri Whitehead

Londonderry High School, New Hampshire

For Ms. Whitehead, science has never been confined to a textbook. From an early fascination with the natural world to her own experiences conducting scientific research, she has developed a teaching philosophy grounded in the belief that science becomes meaningful when students experience it firsthand. She believes that the most powerful learning occurs when students are actively engaged, asking questions, solving problems, observing phenomena, and applying scientific concepts through investigation.

Recognizing that many students doubted their own ability to succeed in science, Ms. Whitehead took action. She created the forensic science course at Londonderry High School with a clear purpose: to make science accessible to every student and to help them discover that they are capable of thinking and reasoning like scientists. Her course welcomes students of all academic backgrounds and provides opportunities for each of them to experience success.

Through forensic science, she has developed a learning environment where inquiry, critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world problem solving come together. Her students do far more than learn forensic concepts. They investigate bloodstain patterns, analyze evidence, conduct laboratory experiments, and apply scientific principles to solve cases. They connect classroom lessons to actual criminal investigations and, by the end of the semester, process a comprehensive crime scene using the skills they have acquired throughout the course.

What makes Ms. Whitehead's work especially impactful is the confidence she builds in her students. As they apply biology, physics, mathematics, and analytical reasoning to forensic investigations, they begin to see themselves differently. Students who once believed they were "not good at science" discover both their capability and their curiosity. They leave her classroom with new skills, greater confidence, and a deeper appreciation for the role science plays in society.








2026
SENATOR JOHN CORNYN III
NATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION
FORENSIC SCIENCE
EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR AWARD



Dr. Sara C. Zapico

New Jersey Institute of Technology

At the heart of Dr. Zapico's teaching philosophy is a simple but powerful belief: students learn best when they actively engage with science and understand its relevance to real-world forensic investigations. She challenges students to think critically, evaluate evidence objectively, and apply scientific reasoning to complex problems. By building strong foundations in biological, chemical, and analytical sciences, she empowers students not only to understand forensic methods, but also to appreciate their strengths, limitations, and ethical implications.

What sets Dr. Zapico apart is her remarkable ability to bring forensic science to life. Through hands-on laboratory experiences, case-based learning, mock investigations, and discussions of actual forensic cases, she transforms the classroom into an environment where students experience the investigative process firsthand. Her students do not simply learn forensic science; they practice it. They analyze evidence, test hypotheses, interpret results, and communicate conclusions, gaining the skills and confidence needed to succeed as future forensic professionals.

As an accomplished and internationally recognized forensic scientist, Dr. Zapico also ensures that her students are exposed to the latest advances in the field. By integrating emerging areas such as forensic genetics, epigenetics, anthropology, and next-generation sequencing technologies into her teaching and research programs, she inspires curiosity and demonstrates that forensic science is a dynamic discipline driven by discovery and innovation. Her commitment to student research provides invaluable opportunities for hands-on learning, professional growth, and scholarly contribution.

Equally important is her dedication to mentorship. Colleagues describe her as a faculty member who invests deeply in her students, supporting them through research experiences, independent studies, career planning, and professional development. She creates an inclusive and supportive learning environment where students feel encouraged to ask questions, challenge assumptions, and develop confidence in their abilities as scientists.

Perhaps the greatest measure of an educator's success is the inspiration they leave with their students. Through her passion, expertise, and unwavering commitment to excellence, Dr. Sara C. Zapico has inspired countless students to pursue knowledge, uphold ethical responsibility, and use science in service of truth and justice.







National Forensic Science Week Packet

[2026 TOOLKIT FOR HOSTING IN-DISTRICT VISITS AND MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF CONGRESS AND/OR THEIR STAFF](#)

A step-by-step guide with resources and templates

WHITE PAPERS DEVELOPED BY CFSO FOR NFSW

- [DOJ Forensic Needs Assessment](#)
 - [AFIS and Interoperability](#)
 - [Coverdell Grant Program](#)
 - [Emerging Technologies](#)
 - [MEC Priorities](#)
- [Grants available and status \(see chart\)](#)
 - [NamUs](#)
 - [Carla Walker Act](#)
 - [Backlog Justice Act](#)
- [Strengthening the Medical Examiner Coroner Act](#)
 - [CODIS Access white paper](#)



NATIONAL FORENSIC SCIENCE WEEK!



#NationalForensicScienceWeek
#NFSW
#ForensicScience
#Forensics
#Science
#CriminalJustice
#STEM

www.thecfso.org

Community Events & Webinars

NJIAI Annual Educational Conference:

The New Jersey Division of the International Association for Identification hosted a three-day conference featuring presentations, workshops, and case studies on topics including investigative genetic genealogy, AI in crime scene investigations, wrongful convictions, evidence photography, and major homicide investigations.

Loyola University New Orleans:

Hosted several events throughout the week, including a Q&A with a professional toxicologist, an induction ceremony for incoming freshmen, and a week-long trivia scavenger hunt.

DEA Laboratory

→ Hosted 3 public Q&As with a forensic science expert in digital examination.

→ Sept. 22: Arlington museum event where attendees met forensic scientists through discussions and demos.

→ Sept. 25: Forensics Festival featuring crime lab experts in chemistry, fingerprints, digital forensics and hazardous environments.

Utah Valley:

The university hosted a week of events covering forensic entomology, medicolegal death investigation, law enforcement drones, anti-doping science, and the impact of working with violent crime, alongside student and alumni activities.

Mental Health in Forensics:

Gap Science hosted a virtual summit focused on burnout, stress, and trauma among professionals, with discussions on workplace support.

International & National Forensic Science Standards, OSAC, and Implementation

Sept. 21 · Erin Forry, John Paul Jones

An overview of international and national forensic science standards, OSAC's role in their implementation, and a new AI tool designed to assist laboratories with standards conformance reviews.

→ [Watch NIST webinar recording](#)

Recent Illicit Drug Trends and Standardization Efforts at NIST

Sept. 21 · Edward Sisco

Discussed emerging illicit drug trends, new analytical methods, and the Rapid Drug Analysis and Research (RaDAR) program's efforts to track these new threats.

→ [Watch NIST webinar recording](#)

A Discussion of Artificial Intelligence Use in Forensic Science

Sept. 25 · Dr. Henry Swofford, Dr. Agnes Winokur, Cleveland Miles, Henry Maynard

Experts from NIST, DEA, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, and Alakai Defense Systems discussed how AI and machine learning are being developed and applied in forensic science.

→ [Watch NIST webinar recording](#)

Idaho State Police Forensic Services:

Forensic and cold case investigators presented a case study on identifying partial skeletal remains, highlighting the use of genetic genealogy and document examination. The presentation was offered in person at Boise State University and virtually.

→ [Watch Webinar Recording](#)

CSI Wisconsin:

Grand Chute Police Department hosted an event where attendees could join in on interactive activities and connect with forensic professionals.

Building a Culture of Quality at the Laboratory:

A2LA's Rachel Duke discussed building a quality culture in crime laboratories that goes beyond compliance to foster trust, communication, collaboration and proactive quality management. She highlighted strategies and recommendations for cultivating a positive quality culture that will enhance the overall quality environment, promote professional development, and recognize accomplishments.

→ [Watch Webinar Recording](#)

Call for Volunteers: 2027 National Forensic Science Week — We are seeking volunteers to help plan and promote the 15th Annual 2027 National Forensic Science Week. The committee welcomes individuals to assist with federal agency outreach, public outreach, media outreach, congressional outreach, corporate outreach, and the John Cornyn III Educator of the Year Award. Join us in expanding the event's reach and celebrating the important contributions of forensic science professionals. Please contact: Alaina Holt at friedrichak@vcu.edu for more information.