



HFSC makes improvements recommended by state agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Texas Forensic Science Commission, at the end of an 18-month-long investigation, has recommended the Houston Forensic Science Center improve parts of its quality and DNA training programs, but found no evidence of misconduct or professional negligence.

HFSC has already implemented many of the recommended improvements and will continue to work with the TFSC to further enhance the DNA and quality programs.

The TFSC is expected to discuss the report and adopt its findings at its quarterly meeting on Friday. HFSC has reviewed a draft of the report.

In its report, the Commission commended Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president, and HFSC DNA technical leader Robin Guidry for "their full support and commitment to the review process since the original complaint was filed."

The TFSC investigation was in response to a complaint by a private citizen that largely focused on contamination events in the DNA laboratory between 2015 and 2016 and the quality investigation conducted to resolve those issues.

The TFSC concluded, after reviewing about 100 quality reports from 2015-2017, that HFSC should improve its training program for new DNA analysts and strengthen its quality investigative process to include a more consistent follow-up procedure that ensures changes are effective.

HFSC has already implemented many of the recommendations, including:

- 1) Having an accreditation expert provide additional training to the quality division and forensic section managers and supervisors on best practices for truly getting to the root cause of an error.
- 2) Hired a training coordinator for the forensic biology/DNA section.
- 3) Hired additional staff for the section responsible for uploading information into the national DNA database, CODIS.
- 4) Purchased contamination-detection technology.
- 5) Implementing a plan to outsource incoming DNA casework for about 10 months to focus on cross-training staff and eliminating existing backlogs.

“The collaboration with TFSC on this complaint has been remarkable, and the changes we have implemented _ some independent of the investigation _ will have long-term, positive impact on HFSC’s operations,” Dr. Stout said.

HFSC will work with TFSC to gather additional data if necessary.

HFSC will update TFSC on improvements and changes to its processes and procedures.

“HFSC looks forward to the continued collaboration with TFSC, and we hope our changes will help not only improve public safety for Houston, but for others in Texas as forensic laboratories learn from one another,” Dr. Stout added.

HFSC is a local government corporation that provides forensic services to the City of Houston and other local agencies. HFSC is overseen by a Board of Directors appointed by the Mayor of Houston and confirmed by the Houston City Council. Its management structure is designed to be responsive to a 2009 recommendation by the National Academy of Sciences that called for crime laboratories to be independent of law enforcement and prosecutorial branches of government.

HFSC operates in seven forensic disciplines.

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