



HFSC praises Congress for approving crucial grant dollars for DNA testing

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The Houston Forensic Science Center commends Congress for reauthorizing the Debbie Smith Act, the major mechanism for crime laboratories nationwide to receive grant dollars to do DNA analysis, including rape kit testing.

The reauthorization by the U.S. House of Representatives on Wednesday guarantees the grant dollars through 2024.

HFSC, like other crime laboratories nationwide, relies heavily on these funds to complete DNA analysis, to purchase equipment and supplies and to train analysts.

HFSC encouraged Congress to reauthorize the act at an event earlier this month with U.S. Senator John Cornyn, who has long supported the Debbie Smith Act and other criminal justice issues that assist forensic agencies. Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner also joined Sen. Cornyn, HFSC board members and two sexual assault survivors at the roundtable event at HFSC's new facility where they discussed the importance of the Debbie Smith Act.

"We praise Congress for reauthorizing this crucial funding mechanism and thank Sen. Cornyn for his steadfast support of the Debbie Smith Act and other forensic issues," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president.

"We, like most other crime laboratories in the nation, would see backlogs grow and turnaround times increase without these dollars. This money helps HFSC and other crime labs do their part to improve public safety and ensure justice."

Dr. Stacey Mitchell, chairwoman of HFSC's board of directors and a forensic nurse, also commended Congress for reauthorizing the grant dollars.

"As a forensic nurse who is often one of the first to speak to a sexual assault survivor after a traumatic incident, I know how crucial it is for these sexual assault evidence collection kits to be tested," Dr. Mitchell said. "I also know from my years with the HFSC board how resource-strapped crime laboratories are and how heavily they rely on these grant dollars. I thank Sen. Cornyn and Congress for its support of the work we do."

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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