



HFSC to use private laboratory for DNA testing while cross-training staff

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Houston Forensic Science Center is planning to send most incoming DNA work to a private lab over about 10 months as it eliminates a backlog and builds a sustainable process that helps avoid future backlogs.

A request for proposals has been issued and the goal will be to begin outsourcing DNA work in the next two months. HFSC estimates it will cost about \$2 million to complete the project, half of it funded by federal grants.

“HFSC, like many labs across the country, has long struggled with backlogs in its DNA section,” said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC’s CEO and president. “Our plan is to simultaneously eliminate a longstanding backlog while building a sustainable, efficient process that allows for an average 30-day turnaround time on DNA work.”

HFSC’s goal is to complete analysis in all disciplines within 30 days of a request being made. Anything over 30 days old is considered backlogged.

The forensic biology/DNA section currently has nearly 950 requests, including about 200 sexual assault kits, that are more than 30 days old. The laboratory work on the rape kits has been completed but is awaiting data analysis.

After HFSC selects a private laboratory or laboratories to do incoming DNA work, it will launch a multi-pronged plan that will last about 10 months.

The plan includes the following components:

- 1) Most incoming DNA work will be sent to a private lab for completion. Priority DNA cases identified by the Houston Police Department as urgent will continue to be completed in-house.
- 2) Over the next 10 months, HFSC forensic biology staff will be cross-trained to perform all three steps in the DNA testing process. Currently, HFSC biology staff are each trained to perform one part of the three-step process, and fewer than 10 analysts are authorized to do the final, time-consuming data analysis step. Cross-training will help alleviate and prevent future delays, especially in data analysis, where HFSC has historically experienced bottlenecks.
- 3) While training and outsourcing are ongoing, those HFSC biology staff members who are already authorized to perform DNA data analysis will focus on completing the backlogged cases. Nearly all the laboratory work has been performed on HFSC's backlogged DNA cases. All that remains is the final step, the data analysis.

“In this case, an investment on the front end will alleviate backlogs going forward,” said Dr. Stout. “Our goal is to provide stakeholders and Houstonians with a quality, timely forensic result, and we are building a process that allows us to do that.”

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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