

WHAT'S NEWS @ HFSC

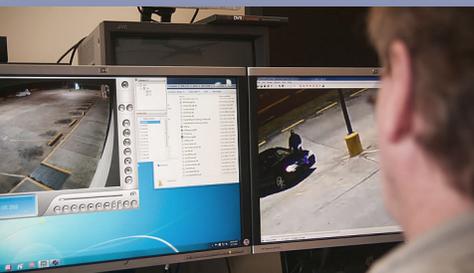
HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER • OCTOBER 2018

HFSC proposes moving to new, downtown facility by end of 2019

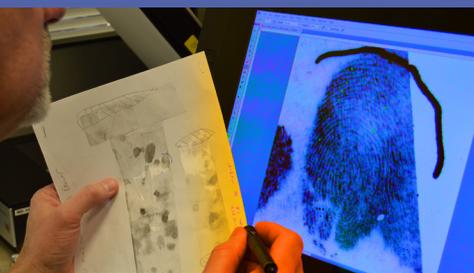
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The Houston Forensic Science Center has proposed a cost-neutral plan to City Council that would allow it to build new laboratory space in a downtown high-rise and move all its staff out of the Houston Police Department's Travis Street headquarters by the end of 2019.

The Houston City Council will vote on the plan at its meeting on October 3.

"HFSC's proposal to fill four floors and a portion of the basement at 500 Jefferson will allow for a specially built crime laboratory that is properly ventilated and has the necessary space and power needs for quality forensic work to be completed safely and efficiently," said Dr. Peter Stout, HFSC's CEO and president.

The proposal is for HFSC to occupy about 83,000 square feet in four floors and a portion of the basement under the terms of a 30-year lease. The owner of the building will, on the front end, cover the costs of construction of the lab on one floor, as well as

for the modifications necessary to accommodate staff in office space and build a firing range and evidence processing area in the basement. The owner recovers those costs over the life of the 30-year lease, allowing HFSC to remain within the confines of the \$2.6 million it currently pays on rent and parking. The owner, John Quinlan, is also donating the office furniture for three of the floors HFSC will be occupying, saving the organizations hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"HFSC has considered many options, including building a brand new facility from the ground up at a cost of about \$150 million as other municipalities have done," Dr. Stout said.

"In the end, we believed this option would more quickly satisfy our needs and provide a cost-effective solution that the City of Houston could handle in a tight budget environment. It also will give the Houston Police Department additional space in the Travis building that it desperately needs. We are excited to present this to council and hope to receive their support."



A Few Words From Our PRESIDENT

HOUSTON FORENSIC SCIENCE CENTER

Peter Stout, PH.D.
CEO/President

I have spent the better part of three years turning over in my head how we can provide Houstonians the best crime lab possible in a tight budget environment. It has been clear that the current facility, HPD headquarters on Travis Street in downtown, hinders certain progress, added efficiencies and in some instances, threatens quality to a point where we are forced to take extra precautions and use greater controls to ensure the scientific integrity of our work. And, of course, there is the perception that the “independent” crime lab created by the City of Houston to provide it forensic services can never truly be independent so long as it is housed in HPD’s headquarters.

Yet it has also been clear that a facility solution for HFSC can’t be done as other agencies nationwide have done this. The typical crime lab facility solution would cost Houston about \$150 million and take many years to complete. We have neither \$150 million nor years to do this. But we still have serious facility needs.

So we have to be smarter and more creative.

We considered moving only some disciplines. Then we looked at warehouse facilities outside of downtown and realized proximity to stakeholders was crucial. And we considered partnering with the University of Houston.

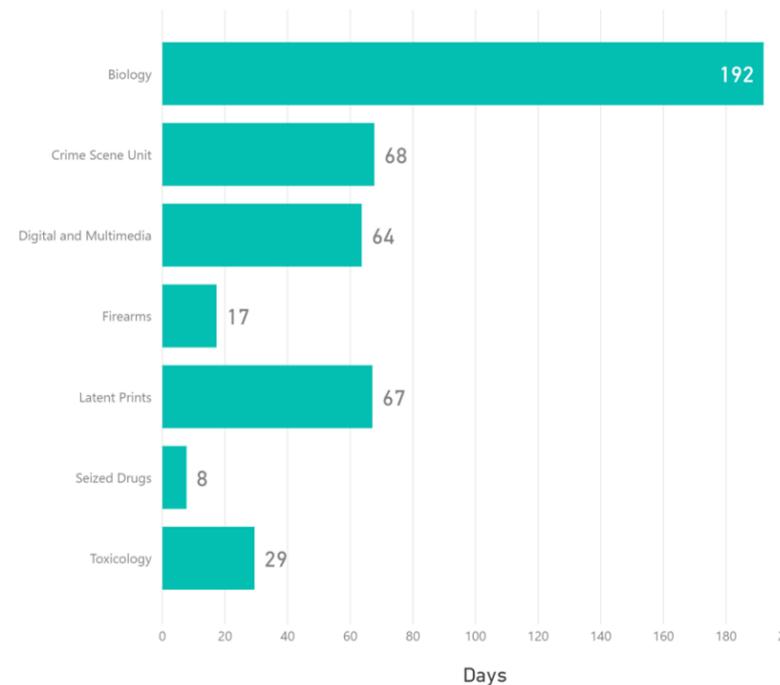
But after reviewing more than 40 options, and seriously considering about six of them, we concluded that the offer at 500 Jefferson provided HFSC and Houston the best of all worlds: a cost-neutral, built-to-suit laboratory specifically designed with forensics in mind that places the financial risk on the owner and allows for a quick move out of HPD.

So here we go.

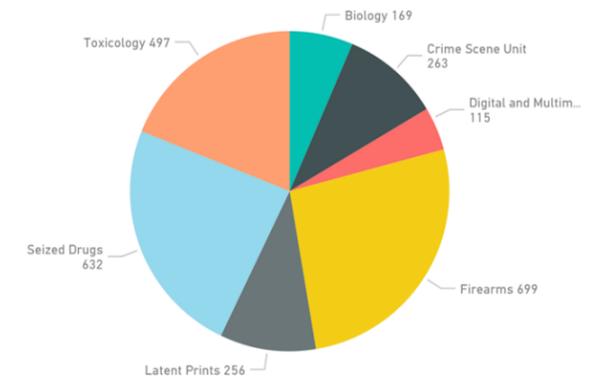
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HFSC At A Glance

Average Turnaround Time for August 2018



Requests Completed by Section



Turnaround Time - Days	40
Completed Requests	2631

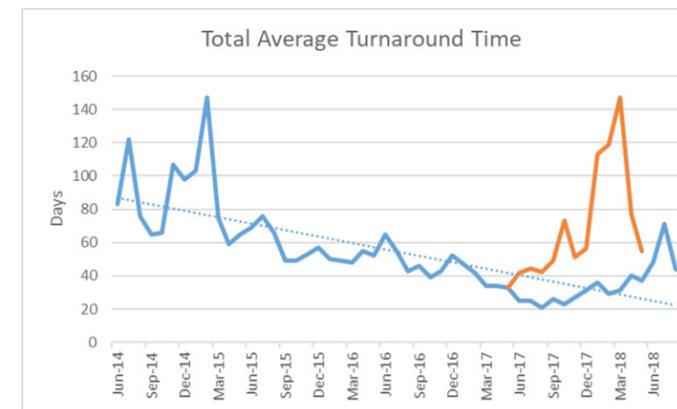
Month Completed

- 01-January
- 02-February
- 03-March
- 04-April
- 05-May
- 06-June
- 07-July
- 08-August

Year Completed

- 2014
- 2015
- 2016
- 2017
- 2018

This data is current as of 8/31/2018.



The Houston Forensic Science Center had a busy month in August, completing more than 2,600 cases compared to just shy of 2,100 in July.

Despite this uptick in caseload, HFSC maintained an average turnaround time of 40 days across disciplines. Although this is above HFSC’s goal of an average turnaround time of 30 days, it is further evidence that most results are reaching stakeholders in a timely manner.

The line graph to the left, a new image for this publication, shows the average turnaround time across months and the general dip. The orange line shows the latent print section’s turnaround time as they work to eliminate a longstanding backlog.

For more information, please visit our website at www.houstonforensicscience.org

Opioid Crisis

HFSC's 2018 SYMPOSIUM

The Houston Forensic Science Center's annual symposium addressed the national opioid crisis and its impact on the justice system.

For the first time, HFSC videotaped the event and is available for viewing [here](#).

The symposium, Hooked on Drugs: Opioids' Impact on the Justice System, was held during National Forensic Science Week.

The goal each year is to address an issue that has national importance.

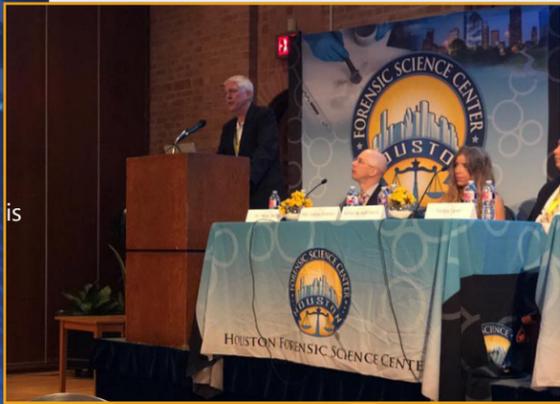
This year's speakers were diverse and addressed different parts of the crisis, which has significant and broad impact.

Harris County Judge Brock Thomas talked about how his court is using a unique, innovative approach to address some drug crimes.

Dr. Paul Speaker, an associate professor at West Virginia University, addressed the economic impact of the crisis on crime labs.

Leonard Kincaid, executive director of the Houston Recovery Center, provided an advocacy perspective, while Katharine Neill Harris, a fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute talked about public policy.

Finally, Amy Wilson, editor of the Cincinnati Enquirer's Pulitzer Prize-winning opioid package, provided real-life stories about how this crisis is impacting people, communities and her city.



Dr. Paul Speaker of West Virginia University speaks at the symposium



Harris County's Judge Brock Thomas speaks at the HFSC symposium



An image of enough carfentanil to kill 4,000 people

OPIOIDS IN HOUSTON

BY KAITLIN MAIN

The national opioid crisis is starting to be felt in Houston.

While the numbers in this area are not as staggering as they are in other parts of the country, Houston and Harris County are rising, and the Houston Forensic Science Center has already seen more fentanyl cases this year than it saw in all of 2017.

The latest information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is that there were more than 72,000 drug overdose deaths in 2017 an increase from 2016 when there were 63,600 overdose deaths, 66 percent of them opioid related. These numbers forced President Trump to declare the opioid epidemic a national crisis and divert additional funds to combat the phenomenon.

Changes to how medications are prescribed, treatment programs, and access to anti-overdose drugs have decreased opioid-related deaths in some regions, but has also pushed some people

who became addicted through prescription medications to seek their high on the streets.

Meanwhile, fentanyl and carfentanil, some of the deadliest opioids are cheap and easy for the producers in China to push into the country via the postal service so drug dealers are using them as cutting agents in heroin and legitimate pharmaceuticals such as Xanax or hydrocodone, leading to accidental overdoses in places like public libraries and Walmart.

In 2017, the Harris County Institute of Forensic Science reported nearly 600 accidental overdoses of which almost 40 percent were opioid related.

And based on the number of accidental opioid-related overdoses as of May 2018, an increase of almost 10 percent is projected for this year.

HFSC's seized drug section handled 24 fentanyl and opioid-related cases in all

of 2017. This year, as of mid-September, it had already had 38 fentanyl cases.

Carfentanil and fentanyl pose major risks to those processing drug evidence at the scene and the lab and therefore safety measures have been taken and protocols changed to protect staff and prevent exposure.

Locally and nationally the battle to fix the epidemic needs to be treated differently than how infectious diseases are handled.



IN 2017, HARRIS COUNTY HAD NEARLY 600 ACCIDENTAL OVERDOSES, 40 PERCENT OF THEM OPIOID RELATED

At an HFSC-sponsored symposium on the opioid crisis on September 21, experts noted there is no one cause and therefore no singular way to address the increase in overdose deaths. Funding has largely been focused on the drug users.

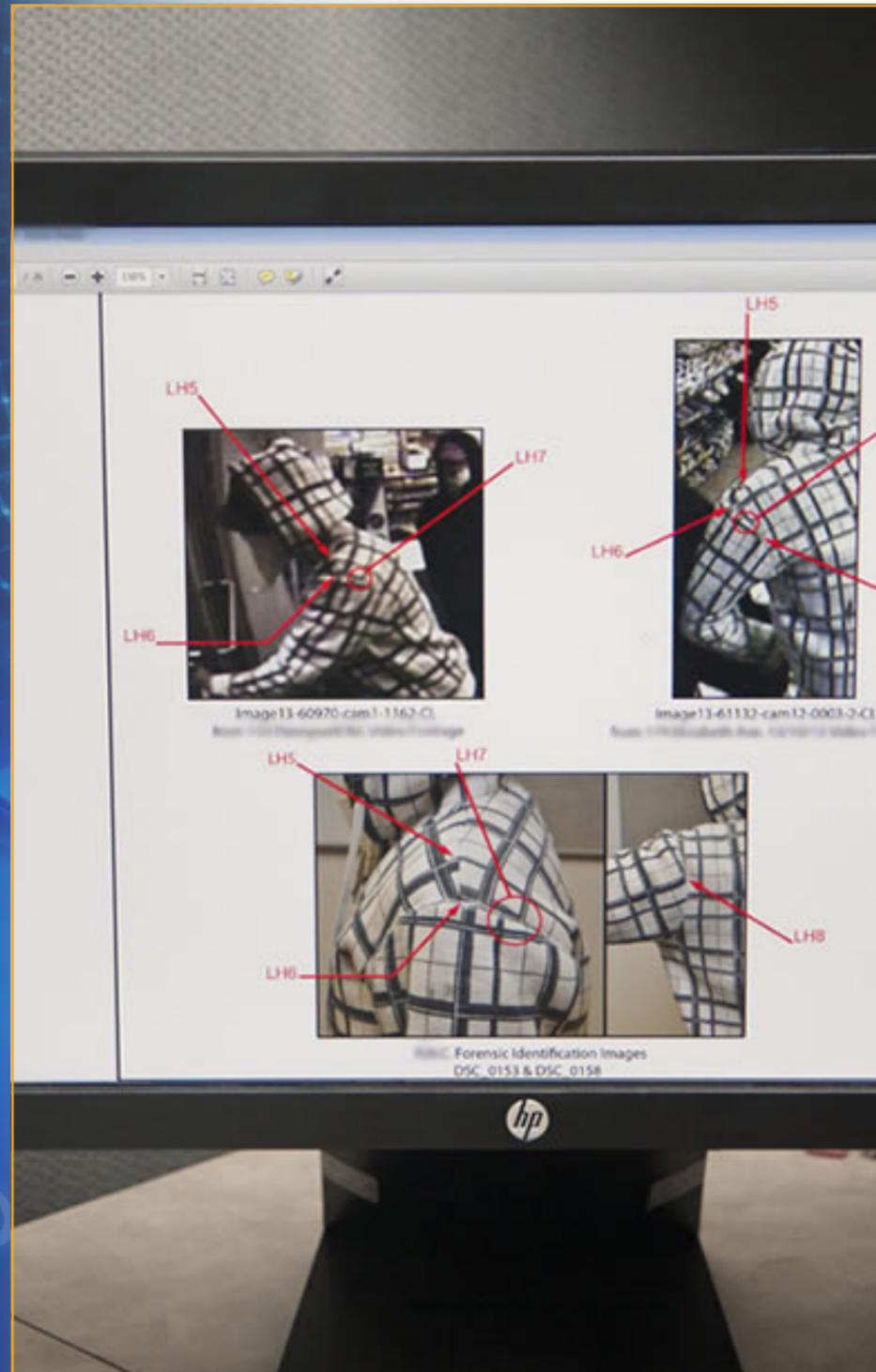
But crime laboratories that are seeing enormous increases in the case submissions and in the complexity of those cases are in desperate need of resources both to create a safe environment for personnel and to efficiently handle these cases. HFSC does not currently have a backlog in its seized drug section and has successfully maintained an average turnaround time of less than two weeks.

Nationally the numbers are much different. Labs in the Midwest, Northeast and the South are buckling under the pressure of thousands of additional cases and growing backlogs that number in the tens of thousands.

Audio/Video

RIGHT ANSWER, RIGHT TIME

By Jordan Benton



Friday July 20. About 8:50 a.m. doctors, nurses, students and patients bustled along the crowded streets and sidewalks near the University of Texas MD Anderson in Houston's Medical Center neighborhood, a dense area of the city jam-packed with hospitals, medical schools and doctors' offices.

In the crowd was Dr. Mark Hausknecht, a 65-year-old cardiologist best known for his care of former President George Bush, biking to work. Dr. Hausknecht's commute was routine. His destination familiar.

He was unaware that alongside him an armed bike rider was watching closely, careful to blend in, waiting for his opportunity.

Gunshots pierced the air and passersby _ many doctors or medical professionals on their way to work _ became first responders, trying to save Dr. Hausknecht who had hit the ground after being shot.

The gunman fled.

Hours later, just before lunch, a phone rang in the audio/video unit at the Houston Forensic Science Center. Adam Sachs, an analyst in the section, answered. It was a high priority call from the Houston Police

Department.

They were investigating the morning's shooting and hoped surveillance cameras had caught the heinous crime.

Sachs made his way to various locations around the crime scene sifting through pertinent footage that could give investigators a lead.

"This is what we're here to do. We give investigators help when they need it. It's about the lead," Sachs said.

But this was just the beginning.

HPD spent the weekend looking for their suspect. HFSC's audio/video analyst, Spender Ledesma, responded to investigators' phone calls

A gas station with a security camera system. A home with a DVR.

Ledesma downloaded and collected footage based on the tips investigators received.

He produced still images from the video footage so police could try to provide the public with an image of a suspect. He used special software to clarify and enhance shots of the gunman.

The hours were long and the pressures from investigators to find a lead were mounting.

A combination of images and videos provided by HFSC analysts, Houston Metro and the hospital allowed police to replay the events of July 20, leading to the shooter, 62-year-old Joseph James Pappas. "Investigators got the right guy because of the videos we pulled and the witnesses who saw what happened. We sometimes get that one case where the guy gets caught," said forensic analyst Spencer Ledesma.

Ledesma ploughed on.

"If you want to do your job right, you have to distance yourself from everything but what you have to do and get it done timely. Every case is important," Ledesma said.

A combination of images



HFSC audio/video analysts retrieve video and use software to enhance and capture still images that can be used to identify suspects

and videos provided by Sachs, Ledesma, Houston Metro and the hospital allowed police to replay the events of July 20 and eventually identify the shooter, 62-year-old Joseph James Pappas.

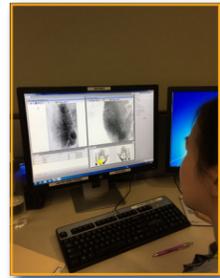
"Investigators got the right guy because of the videos we pulled and the witnesses who saw what happened. We sometimes get that one case where the guy gets caught," Ledesma said.

TFSC DISCLOSURE

LATENT PRINT ERROR

BY JORDAN BENTON

The Houston Forensic Science Center has disclosed to the state's forensic oversight commission an administrative error that occurred in the latent print section.



The disclosure will be on the agenda at the Texas Forensic Science Commission's January

meeting.

The section had to reissue two reports after an examiner mistakenly released preliminary results under the wrong case number in AFIS, the Automated Fingerprint Identification System. AFIS is a database of fingerprints that examiners use to obtain, store and analyze data.

The error occurred when an examiner searched for latent prints in AFIS using the wrong case number.

'Hits' are important because they hold

information that could point stakeholders in the direction of an investigative lead. Once notification of a 'hit' comes through AFIS, a preliminary report gets issued to an investigator by the latent print examiner.

In this case, the investigator received inaccurate information since the "hit" should have been associated to another case. It was after the investigator, who reviewed the preliminary report, requested a full comparison of the prints that the examiner discovered the error.

The examiner immediately notified section management of the mistake so appropriate action could be taken to remedy the mix up.

To address the issue externally, both reports were amended and issued to the



investigators with the correct prints tied to the correct case numbers.

To prevent similar errors from occurring in the future, the latent print section worked closely with HFSC's quality division to determine the reasons behind why the error occurred and to make the necessary changes to standard operating procedures. The internal investigation has closed and all necessary actions and changes have been implemented.

The disclosure to TFSC has been made because inaccurate information was released to stakeholders.



LIMS

WHAT'S NEW?

Behind the scenes at HFSC, staff are diligently preparing for the final transition to the new Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS). But what will impact most stakeholders and what they will notice most is the transition to a new, user-friendly request portal at the end of this year.

The new request portal, Where's My Result, is meant to create a user-friendly experience for stakeholders seeking forensic analysis from HFSC.

Staff are ironing out final details and working closely with the portal's creator and stakeholders to ensure all systems communicate properly and that the training is adequate.

Internally, HFSC scientists are building and testing custom interfaces and reporting templates so more disciplines can be moved from the old LIMS to the new one.

The goal is to have nearly all disciplines operating in the new LIMS by the end of this year along with the new portal.

CSU AND PRINTS **WORKFLOW IMPACTS**

HFSC's CSIs lifting prints, increasing workload for latent print section

The good news is the Houston Forensic Science Center's crime scene investigators are so well-trained and productive they are lifting and processing fingerprints in numbers that have not been seen before.

The not-so-great news? HFSC's latent print section is now drowning in casework and finding it more difficult to eliminate a longstanding backlog.

The best news out of all of this? Each month, Houston Police Department investigators receive dozens of leads that they did not get in the past, helping them solve crimes and improve public safety for the citizens of Houston.

HFSC's Crime Scene Unit, now fully civilianized and on its way to ISO accreditation, has exponentially increased the number of latent print cases originating with them in the past couple of years both by having CSIs better trained to process fingerprints at scenes and by doing a better job of processing vehicles.

In 2014, CSU submitted three cases to the latent print sections and 27 cards with fingerprints "lifted" from scenes.

Compare that to the first eight months of 2018. By the end of August, CSU had already submitted 255 cases and 1,659 lift cards.

The latent print section has also become more efficient, increasing their completion of CSU cases from 33 percent in 2014 to 70 percent in 2018, and processing of lift cards from 22 percent

in 2014 to 73 percent in 2018.

Meanwhile, database "hits" _ or actual leads that can assist police investigators _ that can be directly associated back to work done by CSU has increased from 25 in March 2018 to 85 in August, a 240 percent increase in five months.

"This directly impacts public safety because this is information police can use to solve crimes," said Domingo Villarreal, deputy director of the Crime Scene Unit.

At the same time, Tim Schmah, manager of the latent print section, said a new workflow he implemented about two years ago allows the information to get to investigators more quickly. However, because the group is now being inundated with cases and prints from CSU it is struggling to eliminate its backlog of just over 1,300 requests. The backlog is largely made up of property crimes.

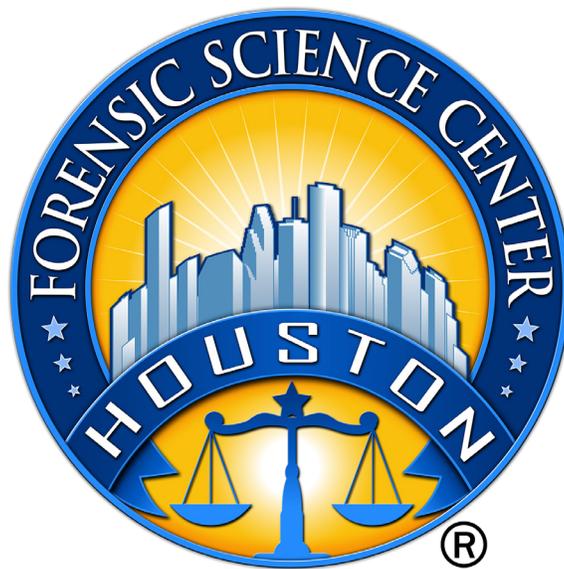
Nearly all violent crime cases, including homicides and sexual assaults, are completed in 30 days or less.

"We are excited to see HFSC's Crime Scene Unit pay closer attention to fingerprints at scenes and on vehicles because we understand how vital this information can be to an investigation," Mr. Schmah said.

"At the same time, we need to adjust to a new, larger workload and figure out what changes we may need to make to ensure that our turnaround time is fast enough to keep the information relevant to stakeholders," he added.



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