



Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

Board of Directors

Public Meeting

~ Minutes ~

Monday, July 28, 2025

www.hfsctx.gov

1. CALL TO ORDER:

At 10:00 a.m., Chairwoman Ellen Cohen called the meeting to order.

The Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc. ("HFSC" and/or the "corporation") board of directors (the "board") convened this in-person meeting on Monday, July 28, 2025, in the City Hall Council Annex Chamber, 900 Bagby St. (public level), Houston, Texas 77002. In a manner permitted by the corporation's bylaws, the meeting was called by providing all directors with notice of the date, time, and purpose of the meeting at least three days before the scheduled date.

In accordance with Chapter 551 of the Texas Government Code (Texas Open Meetings Act) a notice of this meeting was posted on the bulletin board located on the exterior wall of the City Hall building at 901 Bagby on July 22, 2025.

2. ROLL CALL:

The following board members were present in-person:

Chairwoman Ellen Cohen
Vice Chairwoman Joni Baird
Anna Vasquez
Jed Silverman
Jorn Yu
Asma Mirza
Vicki Huff
Jessica Gooch

The following board members arrived late:

Sonia Corrales (approx. 10:07am)

The following board members were absent:

Philip Hilder

Chairwoman Cohen declared a quorum was present.

3. CHAIRWOMAN COHEN'S REPORT:

Chairwoman Cohen shared with the Board that Directors Silverman and Huff had the pleasure of touring the Vehicle Examination Building (VEB) in early June. Both shared some comments regarding their experience. Chairwoman Cohen once again encouraged the other directors to schedule a time to tour the VEB with Dr. Stout.

4. PUBLIC COMMENT:

Chairwoman Cohen gave members of the public an opportunity to address the Board. No members of the public addressed the Board.

5. REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PRIOR MEETING:

Following a motion by Vice Chair Baird, seconded by Director Silverman, the Board unanimously approved the May 9, 2025 meeting minutes.

6. PRESIDENT AND CEO DR. PETER STOUT'S REPORT:

To begin, Dr. Stout provided updates on the latest backlog trends for Forensic Biology (F.Bio), Firearms (FA), and Seized Drugs (SD). One noteworthy change to the F.Bio graph was that sexual assault kits (SAKs) saw a large spike in the number of pending cases, due to the Qiagen manufacturing issue, but the number started to decrease again after testing resumed. As for SD's pending cases, the number is slowly decreasing after three trainee analysts were signed off to start performing casework. Three more trainees will be signed off at the end of 2025, which will further reduce SD's backlog.

Continuing to the topic of budget, Dr. Stout reminded the Board of the risks HFSC needs to manage, and hopefully resolve, in the upcoming years. Most pressing is the challenge of needing more firearms examiners, yet their training takes the longest, and the number of pending FA cases continues to increase during this training period. As for the Toxicology (TOX) section, they face the potential risk of requests rising quickly in the near future, so they are planning to hire more forensic scientists as a preventative measure. Furthermore, HFSC needs to expand their support teams (Research/ Technology/ Development, Legal, Client Services / Case Management (CS/CM), and HR), update facilities, and replace aging IT security equipment. Lastly, the Crime Scene Unit (CSU) is extremely understaffed. Therefore, the additional funds HFSC received from the City of Houston (CoH), combined with roughly \$2 million remaining fund balance from the previous fiscal year, will go toward solving most of these risks. Initially, CoH's final budget allocated \$33.920 million to HFSC, but CoH decided to provide additional funds by completing a Post Budget Justification (PBJ), which is currently still in the approval process. The Board will approve the additional amount when the PBJ is received.

Lastly, Dr. Stout provided updates on the Texas 89th legislative session. SB1620/ HB5293 (Texas Forensic Analyst Apprentice Pilot Program) and SB1660, which relates to the retention and preservation of toxicological evidence of certain intoxication offenses, were signed and will take effect on September 1st. The pilot program is the first of its kind in the nation, so it is an exciting opportunity for Texas to undertake. The Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC) and Texas Association of Crime Lab Directors (TACL D) are currently determining what types of apprentices are needed while drafting administrative rules for how labs can participate and what qualifications are necessary for students to apply. As for SB1660, the new law is expected to help reduce the inventory of old blood tubes sitting in evidence warehouses by properly identifying blood tubes that no longer have scientific value and disposing of them. SB3, the "THC ban," was vetoed by Governor Abbott and will be discussed in the special session, which began on July 21st, with the expectation of a new bill including a regulatory framework. Senator Perry carried SB5 into the Senate in the special session, and a hearing with the Senate State of Affairs occurred on July 22nd, ending with a favorable outlook. It is currently awaiting a Senate vote. SB5 is similar to SB3 but with the addition of exemption for certain agriculture products, such as hemp seeds and fibers. Dr. Stout ended his presentation by giving his opinions on the THC ban struggles and predictions on the outcome.

7. PRESENTATION FROM MR. DAVID LEACH, TREASURER AND CFO, AND CONSIDER APPROVAL OF PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2025 BUDGET REALLOCATIONS, PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR

2026 AMENDED BUDGET, AND POSSIBLE RELATED ACTIONS:

Mr. Leach began his presentation on the proposed fiscal year 2026 amended budget. With a lower budget approved by CoH, Mr. Leach had to amend the HFSC budget to accommodate the reduced funds. He reminded the Board that they originally approved a budget of roughly \$38 million, which included additional funding needed to improve certain sections. However, CoH only approved \$33,920 million for HFSC, excluding the extra \$900,000.00 that will be sent once the PBJ process is complete. Right now, the Board will approve this amount, and once the additional \$900,000.00 is received, the Board will approve another amended budget at a later board meeting. Additionally, Mr. Leach explained in detail as to why HFSC ended the previous fiscal year with a remaining balance of two million dollars, which will help fund mitigation of the risks Dr. Stout mentioned in his presentation, excluding funding for the CSU staff shortage.

Following a motion by Director Silverman, seconded by Director Corrales, the Board unanimously approved proposed fiscal year 2026 amended budget.

Next, Mr. Leach explained to the Board that while the budget for the 2025 fiscal year has already been spent, now the Board needs to make the appropriate adjustments to ensure no individual line-item was overspent. Additionally, the Board needs to approve these adjustments to reflect where the money was actually spent instead of what the original budget forecasted, as those numbers changed during the year due to various factors. In the end, the net budget adjustment equals zero, despite the reallocations made by Mr. Leach.

Director Silverman made a motion to approve the proposed fiscal year 2025 budget reallocations. Director Corrales seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the motion.

8. ADJOURNMENT:

Director Silverman made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Vasquez seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:32am.

The undersigned secretary of the board hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the July 28, 2025 public meeting of the board.

By: Natalee Veazey Haley
Natalee Veazey Haley
Board Secretary