



# Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

Board of Directors

Public Meeting

~ Minutes ~

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Friday, January 9, 2026

[www.hfsctx.gov](http://www.hfsctx.gov)

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## 1. CALL TO ORDER:

At 9:00 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 Friday, January 9, 2026, 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 business 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 January 5, 2026.

## 2. ROLL CALL:

The following board members were present in-person:

Chairwoman Ellen Cohen
Vice Chairwoman Joni Baird
Jorn Yu
Jed Silverman
Sonia Corrales
Vicki Huff
Jessica Gooch

The following board members arrived late:

Asma Mirza (approx. 9:13am)
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The following board members were absent:

Anna Vasquez
Philip Hilder

Chairwoman Cohen declared a quorum was present.

## 3. CHAIRWOMAN COHEN’S REPORT:

Chair Cohen greeted the Board by wishing everyone a Happy New Year and stated she is looking forward to working with the Board in 2026. Additionally, Chair Cohen thanked Director Vasquez for touring HFSC’s lab facility and the Vehicle Examination Building (VEB) with her counterpart from the Texas Innocence Project. Lastly, the March 13<sup>th</sup> board meeting will mostly focus on the proposed fiscal year 2027 budget as presented by Mr. David Leach, CFO. She encouraged the Board to attend the meeting to ensure the budget reflects the organization’s priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

**4. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Chair 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 Director Silverman, seconded by Vice Chair Baird, the Board unanimously approved the November 14, 2025 meeting minutes.

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

To begin, Dr. Stout shared with the Board updates for each forensic discipline including their respective operational plans and potential risks for the calendar year 2026. In Forensic Biology (F.Bio), the section saw the non-sexual assault kit (SAK) backlog reduce by 73% in 2025, due to signing off on thirteen staff members to perform case work, six of which are DNA analysts. Additionally, the section only has 30 SAKs over the 90-day turnaround threshold. For this year, F.Bio's goals are to sign off three more DNA analysts and two screeners, as well as shift to more in-house analysis, reducing reliance on outsourcing and decreasing outsourcing expenses. However, F.Bio has many obstacles to consider in executing this plan. The DNA Capacity Enhancement for Backlog Reduction (CEBR) federal funding is facing long delays in processing the applications, which will have a nationwide impact. To shift from outsourcing to in-house analysis will require a transition period, especially when there are increases in materials and labor costs. Lastly, the section receives a lot of post-conviction cases, and the process is time-consuming, expensive, and complex to complete on top of normal casework.

In Seized Drugs (SD), the non-marijuana backlog is steadily decreasing, reduced by 42% in 2025, and the turnaround time for in-custody (jail) cases is even lower. In 2026, SD will continue training three analysts, stabilizing the backlog, and completing the validation work for their LC-QTOF equipment (Liquid Chromatography – Quadrupole Time- of- Flight). The section's potential obstacles for this year are the risks associated with validating new equipment, such as unpredictable outcomes that may lead to increased amounts of labor and investment, the rising costs of materials, and uncertainty with regulating hemp/marijuana. Next, Firearms (FA) saw their backlog slowly increase last year, which adds to the challenges for this year. There will be a continued sense of urgency in priority case management and limitations in outsourcing on top of handling post-conviction cases in 2026. Furthermore, the field is facing more criticism in their work, so the Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC) will most likely make significant changes in practice requirements regarding how cases are tested and reported. To ease the burdens, the section is recruiting five new examiners, adding them to the two current trainees they have, as well as continuing to use limited outsourcing options to assist with priority case management. Of note, the training arc for FA is two years before trainees are signed off to perform casework, and there are only 72 licensed examiners in Texas. The firearms backlog is a nationwide issue, not just for HFSC's lab.

Moving on to Toxicology (TOX), the section's alcohol turnaround time averaged at thirty days while the drug cases averaged at about 280 days, despite the section's recent staff turnover. The 2026 plan is to rework drug methods for more automation, continued training in addressing turnover, and similarly to SD, complete validation work on their LC-QTOF equipment. The associated risks are as follows: the LC-QTOF validation as described in SD, increase in labor and outsourcing costs due to the staff turnover, and the burden on HFSC resources in training for drug testing. Next, Digital & Multimedia Evidence (DME) has no backlog and increased their infotainment analysis capabilities in 2025. Due to expanding their capabilities, DME plans on working with the Houston Police Department (HPD) and the Harris County District Attorney's Office (HCDAO) to increase requests to HFSC by educating them on DME's services. The issues DME faces are rising storage and software costs, plus balancing

their investigator and lab tasks. Latent Prints (LP) also has no backlog in either processing or comparison for 2025, even while focusing on training new examiners. LP's goals are to maintain the lack of backlog while training HPD on the available resources in the section's services. The potential challenges they face in 2026 are the AFIS changes and outages, including the county system communication issues.

For the last section, the Crime Scene Unit (CSU) saw a significant staff turnover while implementing a new management structure and schedule last year. Despite these issues, CSU steadily maintained their backlog status, namely remaining current on scene and vehicle reports. Dr. Stout reiterated that CSU is a small unit, given the size of Houston and number of homicide scenes they respond to, even with the nationwide 15% reduction in homicides seen in 2025. Currently, the unit has seven crime scene investigators (CSIs) in training while undergoing the transition period for the new management. With CSI turnover, there will be more burdens on the unit and increased costs for labor and training. As a final operational update, the Property Room transition is still in process. HFSC finished the construction at its facility last year and started transferring evidence in-house. In the new year, HFSC will inventory and transfer the SAKs to their evidence room while beginning the process of moving the frozen storage as well. Concurrently, HFSC plans on finalizing transition plans between HFSC, HPD, and the City of Houston.

**7. QUALITY DIRECTOR JACKELINE MORAL'S REPORT:**

To start, Mrs. Moral informed the Board of the 2025 ANAB Property & Evidence re-assessment that occurred on December 10<sup>th</sup>. This audit focused on compliance for all accreditation requirements, of which HFSC passed with no nonconformances identified. In the 2025 testimony data report, she shared that HFSC analysts who were subpoenaed to testify spent a total of 977 hours in court, 184 of those hours accounted for actual testimonies on the stand. Comparing the sections, CSU, F.Bio, and FA spent the most time spent waiting in court to testify. The Quality team also reported data on testimony monitoring, which is an internal requirement for testifying analysts to be observed by an experienced analyst from their respective section. Last year, 95% of the testimonies were monitored, and monitors spent a total of 256 hours in court with F.Bio and TOX leading the numbers. Concluding her presentation, Mrs. Moral provided an overview of testimony data throughout the years.

**8. ADJOURNMENT:**

Vice Chair Baird made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Silverman seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 9:49am.

The undersigned secretary of the board hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the January 9, 2026 public meeting of the board.

By: Natalee Veazey Haley  
Natalee Veazey Haley  
Board Secretary