



Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

Board of Directors

Public Meeting

~ Minutes ~

Friday, March 13, 2026

www.hfsctx.gov

1. CALL TO ORDER:

At 9:01 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, March 13, 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 March 9, 2026.

2. ROLL CALL:

The following board members were present in-person:

Chairwoman Ellen Cohen
Vice Chairwoman Joni Baird
Anna Vasquez
Jorn Yu
Scott Durfee
Sonia Corrales
Vicki Huff
Jessica Gooch

The following board members arrived late:

Asma Mirza (approx. 9:02am)

The following board members were absent:

Jed Silverman

Chairwoman Cohen declared a quorum was present.

3. CHAIRWOMAN COHEN’S REPORT:

Chair Cohen provided an update on the board composition, sharing that Director Philip Hilder recently stepped down from the Board due to extenuating health circumstances. She expressed gratitude to Director Hilder for his dedicated service to the Board. To fulfill the remainder of Director Hilder’s term, Director Scott Durfee was recently appointed by Mayor Whitmire and City Council. Director Durfee shared a few words to express his enthusiasm for joining the Board.

Next, Chairwoman Cohen thanked Director Yu for taking the time to tour HFSC and the Vehicle Examination Building in February with his guests from Taiwan's Criminal Investigations Bureau. Furthermore, she added a note about the possibility of the Board touring HFSC's newly constructed basement for evidence storage in the near future. Lastly, she notified the Board about an emergency contract amendment relating to Signature Science, LLC's forensic outsourcing services that needed to be approved by Chair Cohen and Vice Chair Baird after the January board meeting to ensure there were no delays in processing forensic biology cases. At a previous Board meeting, the Board agreed to allow amendments of this nature to be approved in between board meetings if they were time-sensitive matters. The original Signature Science contract was approved by the Board in the November 2024 board meeting in the amount of \$2,550,000. In the new amendment, an additional \$550,000 was added to the contract, which was approved on February 26, 2026. This does not pertain to agenda item number 8.

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 Vice Chair Baird, seconded by Director Vasquez, the Board unanimously approved the January 9, 2026 meeting minutes.

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

Dr. Stout began by expressing gratitude to Director Hilder, thanking him for his service to HFSC. For the report, Dr. Stout explained to the Board about how HFSC has made enormous progress on various backlogs while continuing to expand and improve the company and its facility over the years. This could not have been accomplished without the support of the City of Houston (CoH) and its past HFSC budget decisions that have had major impacts on the company's future operations. He provided updated charts on Forensic Biology (F.Bio), Seized Drugs (SD), and Firearms (FA) backlogs. With the incredible work of Dr. Amy Castillo, COO, and the F.Bio team, F.Bio is almost in a place where its lab can be sustainably managed, including reducing the outsourcing services. SD is slowly chipping away at its backlog as more SD trainees are signed off to perform casework. As for FA, there is a plan in place to combat the backlog, which consists of hiring several FA examiner trainees and external trainers.

For the upcoming fiscal year (FY) 2027 (July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027), Dr. Stout went into detail about the reasonings for how the proposed FY27 budget was produced. Besides inflation, he discussed the cost per request data, derived from the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics article titled, "Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2020" by Connor Brooks. This report is the most current data publicly available at the moment and is beneficial as it is the best cross-sectional view of the nation's crime labs. It represents total work requested, total budgets of all public labs, total "backlog" in absolute numbers etc. Another report Dr. Stout gained data from was the "Project FORESIGHT Annual Report, 2022-2023," by Dr. Paul Speaker, comprised of economic benchmarks based on 211 labs, 24 of which are international labs. This is useful data as it showcases the distribution of funding per request, broken out by discipline/service type. Based on these two research sources, Dr. Stout then explained to the Board that HFSC's estimated average, weighted cost per request is \$2,200, meaning HFSC's mixture of requests is more expensive than the national weighted average of \$1,400 per request. Keep in mind that HFSC does not have DNA databasing and has a lower rate of drug cases than most labs, but F.Bio and FA are the more costly sections. In the current fiscal year, HFSC will have completed about 22,000 requests and spent roughly \$37 million with an average of \$1,600 per request. This particular average has allowed HFSC to vastly improve its quality, reduce backlogs, and move towards a more sustainable management of labs, thanks to the dedicated staff making it work within the given budget. The proposed FY27 budget was built with the assumption of HFSC completing another 22,000 requests at about \$1,600 per request in the upcoming fiscal year along with the expected 15% increase in F.Bio cold case requests from the

Houston Police Department (HPD) and the labor expansion for HFSC's property operations for evidence storage. Should HFSC be granted less funds than requested from the CoH, HFSC runs the risk of losing its momentum in operations and gaining more backlogs in various disciplines once again. Should this predicament occur, it takes about five years to recover from the backlogs after obtaining enough labor that has survived the varying training arcs each discipline undergoes after hiring. It is crucial HFSC receives the requested funds in order to maintain progress in continuing sustainable operations and continue serving high quality results to the stakeholders.

7. CONSIDER DELEGATING AUTHORITY TO DR. STOUT TO NEGOTIATE AND ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN NATIONAL MEDICAL SERVICES (NMS) LABORATORIES AND THE CORPORATION:

Dr. Stout provided a couple more notes regarding this vendor. HFSC's Toxicology section outsources cases to NMS Labs based on priority status and type of analysis. Cases requiring a quicker turnaround time than the section can manage will be outsourced, in addition to cases needing certain analyses that are not offered by HFSC.

With Director Corrales' motion, seconded by Director Vasquez, the Board unanimously approved the contract between NMS Labs and HFSC for forensic outsourcing of Toxicology cases, budget not to exceed \$400,000.00. The Board authorized Dr. Stout to execute the agreement on the Board's behalf.

8. CONSIDER DELEGATING AUTHORITY TO DR. STOUT TO NEGOTIATE AND ENTER INTO AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN SIGNATURE SCIENCE, LLC AND THE CORPORATION:

Dr. Castillo gave more context about this contract. HFSC was awarded the 2024 Capacity Enhancement and Backlog Reduction 15-PBJA-24-GG-02733-DNAX federal grant to help address HFSC's current backlog of F.Bio cases. HFSC has consistently utilized outsourcing in the F.Bio section to assist with various operational needs over the years, making significant progress in reducing its backlog. This grant will specifically assist HFSC in continuing to work through its backlog, which is a priority for the Corporation and its stakeholders.

With Director Vasquez's motion, seconded by Director Huff, the Board unanimously approved the contract between Signature Science, LLC and HFSC for forensic outsourcing of F.Bio cases to be funded by the FY24 Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) DNA CEBR federal grant, budget not to exceed \$760,367.00. The Board authorized Dr. Stout to execute the agreement on the Board's behalf.

9. TREASURER AND CFO DAVID LEACH'S PRESENTATION ON AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025 PURSUANT TO THE SINGLE AUDIT ACT:

Chair Cohen reminded the Board of the outstanding audited financial statements for FY25 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025) pursuant to the Single Audit Act, due to the federal government's pending notice of the updated federal guidelines. Mr. Leach announced that HFSC passed this particular audit as well, completed by Blazek & Vetterling, and no non-conformances were found during FY25.

10. TREASURER AND CFO DAVID LEACH'S PRESENTATION ON PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET AND CONSIDER APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED BUDGET:

Mr. Leach began his presentation by providing a history of HFSC's revenue streams between FY18-FY26, reminding the Board that HFSC is designed to spend 100% of its cash by the end of each fiscal year. Next, he compared how funds were spent in FY26 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026) and FY25, which was similar. For the purpose of the budget proposal, Mr. Leach went into detail on how much

the CoH provided in cash over the last few years. With a proposed budget of about \$38 million, an 11% increase from last year, HFSC would be able to provide services in a similar manner to the current fiscal year while continuing to expand HFSC's property and evidence team. It is important to note that at the beginning of FY26, HFSC had about two million dollars leftover from FY25 in addition to the funds granted by CoH; however, by the end of this current fiscal year, HFSC is forecasted to have roughly \$600,000 remaining in cash. With the proposed budget in mind, Mr. Leach presented the forecasted employee costs, headcount, services, supplies, capital, and non-capital for the upcoming fiscal year, along with line-item details to showcase where the funds will be allocated. With these factors taken into consideration, Mr. Leach asked the Board to approve \$38.8 million as the budget proposal to submit to CoH for final approval.

Director Huff made a motion to approve the proposed FY27 budget. Director Corrales seconded the motion, and the Board unanimously approved the FY27 budget proposal.

11. QUALITY DIRECTOR JACKELINE MORAL'S REPORT:

To start, Mrs. Moral informed the Board of the Management Review report that was completed in January for the calendar year 2025, which is an overall diagnostic of the facility to ensure the processes and procedures are still performing well, satisfying the stakeholders, and maintaining compliance. Last year, a total of ten audits were performed to ensure HFSC is meeting internal requirements as well as external accreditation requirements while 362 blind cases were submitted to monitor the reliability of standard operating procedures and test analysts' performance competency and proficiency. Seven OSAC standards were enacted, nine risk assessments were completed, and 16 preventive actions/ process improvements were implemented, all of which are proactive measures to resolve any minor problems or issues before they potentially become nonconformances in the future. Concluding the review report, 194 nonconformances were reported to the Quality Division. This is a healthy indicator of the quality culture at HFSC because it signifies staff are comfortable in being proactive and taking accountability into their own hands, allowing for the Quality division to investigate and remedy errors in a timely manner. For the last topic, Mrs. Moral reminded the Board of the 2026 internal audit season, starting at the end of March, and its purpose to demonstrate compliance with all accreditation standards, HFSC quality manual, OSAC registry standards, and section specific standard operating procedures.

12. ADJOURNMENT:

Vice Chair Baird made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Vasquez seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:40am.

The undersigned secretary of the board hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the March 13, 2026 public meeting of the board.

By: Natalee Veazey Haley
Natalee Veazey Haley
Board Secretary