

Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

VIRTUAL MEETING OF BOARD OF DIRECTORS
MINUTES
February 12, 2021

The undersigned, being the duly appointed secretary of the Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc., (“HFSC” and/or the “Corporation”) hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the February 12, 2021 virtual meeting of the Board of Directors (the “board”) of the Corporation.

- A. In a manner permitted by the Corporation’s Bylaws, the meeting was called by providing all directors with notice of the date, time (instructions for Microsoft Teams access and call-in options) and purposes of the meeting more than three days before the date of the meeting.
- B. In accordance with Chapter 551, Texas Government Code and Governor Greg Abbott’s March 16, 2020 temporary suspension of certain provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act, notice of this meeting was duly posted online to www.houstonforensicscience.org on February 9, 2021 along with a free-of-charge videoconference link, dial-in phone number and an electronic copy of the agenda packet, as required.
- C. The virtual meeting on Microsoft Teams was called to order by Board Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell at approximately 9:01 a.m. on Friday, February 12, 2021.
- D. Board Secretary Jordan Benton called the roll. The following directors were present: Stacey Mitchell, Mary Lentschke, Anna Vasquez, Philip Hilder, Francisco Medina, Janet Blancett, Lois Moore, Vicki Huff and Tracy Calabrese

Ellen Cohen experienced technical difficulties and joined the meeting at approximately 9:07 a.m. after the roll was called. Chairwoman Mitchell declared a quorum.
- E. Throughout the meeting various board members experienced technical difficulties, which caused them to briefly drop and then rejoin the meeting in a timely manner. At no point in time was a quorum lost.
- F. Chairwoman Mitchell announced that HFSC’s virtual board meeting was being held in compliance with Governor Greg Abbott’s temporary suspension of certain provisions of the Texas Open Meetings Act in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- G. Chairwoman Mitchell said the board agenda included an email address and phone number for members of the public to use to address the board. The Chairwoman asked Secretary Benton if any members of the public wished to address the board. Ms. Benton said no one had requested to address the board. The chairwoman opened the meeting for public comment. No one addressed the board. Chairwoman Mitchell said she would leave the public comment period open for a few minutes to give possible late attendees the chance to speak.
- H. Chairwoman Mitchell asked if any changes needed to be made to the December 11, 2020 board meeting minutes. No directors had changes. Director Moore made a motion to approve the

minutes. Director Hilder seconded the motion. The Chair called for a voice vote and the motion passed unanimously.

- I. Chairwoman Mitchell asked if any changes needed to be made to the December 29, 2020 board meeting minutes. No directors had changes. Director Blancett made a motion to approve the minutes. Director Vasquez seconded the motion. The Chair called for a voice vote and the motion passed unanimously.
- J. Chairwoman Mitchell asked if any changes needed to be made to the January 13, 2021 board meeting minutes. No directors had changes. Director Moore made a motion to approve the minutes. Director Medina seconded the motion. The Chair called for a voice vote and the motion passed unanimously.
- K. Chairwoman Mitchell presented a chair's report. She reminded HFSC staff and the board to prioritize self-care given the challenges of this year and last.
- L. Dr. Peter Stout, president and CEO, said the lab's total average turnaround time is 100 days. He added that the toxicology section accounted for half of the laboratory reports released last month, and that a few more analysts are able to independently work on blood alcohol cases. Dr. Stout said the lab has 10 open positions and reviewed recent staff certifications. He said HFSC is beginning to discuss its budget with Houston city council members, adding that Council Members Pollard, Peck and Alcorn had visited the lab and engaged in positive discussion.

Dr. Stout said almost 140 HFSC staff had received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine and 30 staff were awaiting their first dose. About 41 staff opted out of receiving the vaccine for varying reasons. Dr. Stout and Chairwoman Mitchell thanked the Houston Health Department for their assistance and for allowing HFSC staff to be prioritized so they can continue serving the City of Houston. He said about three HFSC staff currently have the virus and do not have worrisome symptoms.

Dr. Stout said the vehicle examination building project is complete, and that the facility continues to receive a significant number of vehicles for processing. Chairwoman Mitchell and Dr. Stout thanked the City of Houston for their assistance with the project.

Dr. Stout said the digital and multimedia division began using a new software, called UFED, that has a 42 percent success rate, a climb from the 38 percent success rate of another software the section uses called GrayKey. He said the section has only one UFED license, meaning they can only connect one phone at a time to be unlocked. Dr. Stout said the section is looking into additional licensure with GrayKey since it has made improvements to the software, possibly allowing more phones to be unlocked for less money. Dr. Stout said the digital and multimedia section continues seeing an increase in requests and is working through a backlog. He said the section's needs are becoming a concern and will possibly be discussed during the next fiscal year budget cycle.

Dr. Stout said HFSC's primary goal is public safety, and to address areas for improvement in HFSC's services, the crime scene unit (CSU) is a primary focus. He said CSU's workload has increased significantly due to the rising crime in Houston, particularly the over 40 percent homicide rate increase compared to last calendar year. Dr. Stout added that homicides

increased by 45 percent comparing January 2020 to January 2021. CSU is struggling to keep up, and other sections will feel the impacts from the increase in evidence. Dr. Stout said from 2017 to 2020, CSU consumed the most overtime hours, followed by the firearm's National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN.) HFSC has four NIBIN technicians who have worked through a significant increase in firearm submissions. Dr. Stout said the overtime dollars are not a financial challenge, but the hours worked highlights the amount of work the group is taking on. Dr. Stout said HFSC is six years old and has an average work tenure of 3.7 years. He added that CSU's average tenure is 2.5 years, and that the unit has been civilianized for about three years. Dr. Stout acknowledged that the turnover in CSU is higher than it should be and reflects staff burnout. He said ideally, the 28-member crime scene unit should have about 150 crime scene investigators to keep up with Houston's demand. CSU's five-year plan includes an additional CSIs each year of the plan who will be trained at the National Forensic Academy in Tennessee. The distance learning will save HFSC about six months of training time. Dr. Stout said CSU's capital investment will be a \$198k command vehicle that will serve as a rest and relief station for CSIs responding to labor and time-intensive scenes. Dr. Stout said CSU continues to make progress with validating drone and mapping technologies to help improve the documentation process CSIs perform on scenes. He said a few weeks ago, HFSC hired a professional survey team to make high procession measurements to validate the mock scene and to ensure the new technology is performing as expected. Dr. Stout said CSU is aiming to use the new tools on crime scenes after March 16. He added that the FAA made a few rule changes that go into effect after that date, which will make it easier for the unit to fly a drone, particularly over people.

Dr. Stout said HFSC launched a process improvement project for the crime scene unit, which is expected to end in June 2021. He said improvements have already been implemented since the project launch, including the modification of a process that caused a safety risk for HFSC staff transporting narcotic evidence. Now, Houston Police Department (HPD) officers take drug evidence directly from scenes. Dr. Stout said CSIs use pencils and paper on scenes and then must transcribe their notes into a system. The project is aiming to eliminate the transcription steps and help identify how to efficiently manage large sets of data that will be stored electronically.

Dr. Stout said that national changes being made to the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC) registry will change how samples are screened in the toxicology section, and that a fourth instrument called the LC-QQQ will help the section meet those new standards. He said another instrument, called the LC-QTOF, will also be needed for screening and identifying new drugs, and its purchase is built into the next year's budget. Dr. Stout said the firearms section will need to purchase or lease a \$220k microscope, which will provide a 3D scan of microscopic features, that will help the section acquire more algorithmic and statistically accurate results. He said nationally, the firearms discipline is being criticized for the marginal statistical discrepancies found in the current process. Dr. Stout said HFSC will not be the first lab to use the new microscope and is being used in casework elsewhere in the country.

Dr. Stout said the latent prints section and the NIBIN and digital and multimedia units have needs that are not included in the budget, which is a cause for concern. He said firearms submissions have gone up significantly, and capacity in the section is a place for concern, though is uncertain if the upward trend will continue over time. Dr. Stout said the latent print

section has the largest backlog that continues to rise, adding that as CSU responds to more scenes and collects more evidence, the section will continue to take on additional requests. He said the ongoing process improvement project in the latent print section will help the section gather more data to help determine concrete needs for the section. He said the digital and multimedia section is also working through increased requests, a cause behind resurfacing backlogs. Dr. Stout said he is unsure if the increase is due to the pandemic, or if it's a trend that will continue. Director Cohen asked Dr. Stout if all Houston city council members have visited the lab. Dr. Stout said not yet, but the goal will be to ensure everyone does. Director Cohen urged Dr. Stout to speak before Houston city council's public safety committee before the council votes on HFSC's budget request. Dr. Stout said that is HFSC's goal, and that he spoke with the City of Houston's finance department to begin the conversation.

- M. Mr. David Leach, CFO and treasurer, presented an overview of HFSC's fiscal year 2022 budget. Mr. Leach told the board that this year 68 percent of HFSC's budget went to staffing, and that next year that total will increase to 70 percent because of the additional hiring that is planned in CSU. He said service costs, supplies, capital and interest expenses also remained somewhat consistent. Mr. Leach said an incremental add of \$858k will be distributed to the crime scene unit, adding that personnel costs totaled \$524k, supplies totaled \$36k and the unit will spend \$198k in capital for the command vehicle. Mr. Leach said HFSC is requesting \$28.508 million from the City of Houston, a \$1.3 million increase year-over-year. That total includes a three-year lease for a \$84k/year LC-QQQ instrument for the toxicology section, a five-year lease for a \$126k/year LC-QTOF toxicology instrument and a \$220k microscope for the firearms section. He added that HFSC spend \$28.9 million this year, which included an excess of \$1 million in grant spending and an approved \$1.3 million that will be refunded to HFSC from Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding. Director Moore asked if the budget included salary increases for employees. Mr. Leach said salary increases for staff is included. Mr. Leach reviewed budgets from fiscal year 2015 through the current year. Mr. Leach said service costs account for about 17 percent of HFSC's expenses, and cost about \$5 million this year since \$1.3 million of the spending was authorized through CARES Act dollars. He said toxicology case outsourcing and software investments accounted for a lot of those expenses, and the money received from the CARES Act would not be included in next year's budget. Mr. Leach said the cost of supplies remained flat year over year, and that although inflation is expected, HFSC will find a way to absorb the cost through methods like process improvement projects. Mr. Leach review capital expenses, noting that HFSC has three LC-QQQ instruments in a three-year lease, which accounts for about \$308k. He said the RapidDNA contract will cost almost \$400k. Additional expenses, such as vehicles, a fourth LC-QQQ instrument, a LC-QTOF instrument and a digital microscope for firearms will make up the \$976k in capital spending.
- N. Mr. Leach requested the board approve HFSC's \$28,508,207 budget, which includes a \$1.3 million increase. Director Cohen made a motion to approve the budget. Director Hilder seconded the motion. Secretary Benton called the roll, and the following directors were in favor: Stacey Mitchell, Mary Lentschke, Anna Vasquez, Philip Hilder, Francisco Medina, Janet Blancett, Lois Moore, Vicki Huff and Ellen Cohen. With none opposed, the motion passed unanimously.
- O. Dr. Amy Castillo, vice president and COO, said the overall backlog percentage decreased in January, highlighting that over 300 requests were completed from toxicology's blood alcohol

backlog. In January, a little over 40 kits in the forensic biology/DNA's in-house rape kit backlog were cleared. She said HFSC's Firearms Manager, Donna Eudaley, will go into detail about the challenges NIBIN is facing. Dr. Castillo said the forensic biology/DNA section will issue new contracts for outsourcing for newly issued grants. She gave the board an overview of this year's operations report presentation schedule.

Dr. Castillo reminded the board that in 2020, HFSC updated its productivity goal. She said formerly, the goal to decrease backlogs and turnaround times were in contrast with one another since a turnaround time is calculated when a request is closed. As backlogs are reduced, the turnaround time goes up since older cases are being completed. Dr. Castillo said analysts will also be reviewed on their analysis turnaround time, a stat that is controlled by the analysts and begins when a case is assigned and ends when a report is issued. She added the target goal will be 28 days, and that the average analysis turnaround time in the last 12 months was 24 days. She said the goal increased since there are more obstacles and complications impacting the lab. Dr. Castillo said the lab will also work to reduce the average age of pending requests by 30 percent, and that the ongoing outsourcing in forensic biology/DNA and the blood alcohol backlog elimination will help the lab reach this goal. This target will also make staff focus on older cases but allow room for stakeholders to make rush requests for priority cases. Dr. Castillo said the average age of pending requests has been decreased by 11 percent since September when staff began measuring the new goal.

Director Cohen having tech issues.

Dr. Castillo said HFSC staff are working to update the dashboard so that data related to the new goals will be included in the monthly updates. She added that more people need to be trained on how to manage the dashboard since only three people on staff can incorporate updates, which is causing delays. Director Blancett asked if the analysis turnaround time includes training time for analysts. Dr. Castillo said the time is not included in the calculation, but they did consider staffing changes and balance expectations as changes come.

Dr. Castillo gave a 2020 overview of each section and said the client services and case management division (CS/CM) reduced staff by 50 percent from April through the end of the year, with the exception of one month when pandemic numbers appeared to decrease but then went back up. CS/CM saw only an 8 percent decrease in amount of evidence transfers needed for the lab. Dr. Castillo said the COVID-19 vaccine will allow the section to come fully back onsite. The seized drugs section has been operating at 50 percent capacity since April, except for the one month that saw a decline in COVID-19 cases. The section's requests, except for October, decreased around 40 percent of what's normally received. The seized drug analysts kept up with the incoming case load for a while, but a week-long shutdown due to Hurricane Laura impacted the group's 50 percent capacity. The section's new, lengthy marijuana testing followed by a month where case requests went back to normal levels also caused strain on the section. Since then, the section has been unable to catch up, causing an increase in the overall turnaround time and a developing backlog. At end of year, the seized drugs section had 239 backlogged requests, 83 belonging to the new marijuana testing method. Dr. Castillo said once the section's staff are back onsite fully, they should be able to recover quickly. Dr. Castillo said the toxicology section shifted to a paperless process at the start of the pandemic, which helped the section balance time spent in the lab and work that could be performed at home. The

toxicology section has increased their capacity, and the section's three-year plan has helped the section understand long-term goals and training needs. Dr. Castillo said the firearms section is broken up in two parts: NIBIN and comparative analysis. She said Ms. Eudaley will go more into detail about NIBIN but added that the firearms examiners have done some work at home, but most of their work must be done on microscopes in the lab. She said the section's turnaround time has been steady but increased slightly in September and October. Dr. Castillo said the forensic biology/DNA section is working through their rape kit backlog and will develop a plan to avoid backlogs in the section in the future. She said the section ended the year with 901 cases in the backlog, which should be cleared by the end of 2021. She said the section has made a lot of progress on rape kits this year and has worked through 371 backlogged in-house rape kits the remaining in house backlog should be completed by end of April. Dr. Castillo said lessons learned have helped the forensic biology/DNA's CODIS, or Combined DNA Index System, unit has made incredible progress thanks to a process improvement project, and now the CODIS team has a below 15-day average turnaround time on hits. CODIS is a national DNA database where DNA profiles are uploaded and provide potential leads on cases or potentially convicted offenders. Dr. Castillo highlight that STRmix, the new software implemented in the forensic biology/DNA section, interprets more DNA data that can be eligible for CODIS. Dr. Castillo said the latent print section is struggling to close the gap between incoming casework and reports released. She said the ongoing process improvement project will help the section implement potential efficiencies, and that the next step in the project process will be to determine section needs. Dr. Castillo reminded the board that four of the section's latent print examiners trained at an offsite location and returned to HFSC to complete required inhouse training. She said two examiners were recently approved to perform independent casework, another examiner was in the mock trial stage and is expected to complete training in a few weeks and the last examiner should complete training by April. Dr. Castillo said these examiners will help the section's capacity. The latent print processing group has two staff in training, and one will replace a recently promoted examiner and the other will be an addition to help with capacity. Dr. Castillo said the digital and multimedia section also operated at 50 percent capacity in 2020. Digital requests increased by 9 percent and audio/video requests increased by 10 percent in 2020. The section kept up with the audio/video requests, but a backlog formed in the digital section because staff could not keep up. The section will focus on cross-training to help with capacity.

- P. Ms. Erika Ziemak, quality director, said the quality division exceeded their 576 blind quality control submission goal in 2020 by two. Ms. Ziemak highlighted that the latent print blind verification goal cannot always be met on a monthly basis since the latent print section management must identify a qualifying case for the blind, and that the submission goal was surpassed even with the limited candidate cases. The quality division made two adjustments to their monthly submission goals. The blind submission goal is typically determined by calculating 5 percent each section's total number of completed requests, which can be indicative of the section's capacity. Ms. Ziemak said the quality division will decrease their monthly blind submission goals for the seized drugs section from 15 to 10. They determined that the section's increase in requests and alternating work schedule presented a capacity issue for the section. Ms. Ziemak said the quality division also decreased their latent print processing goal from two to one per month. She said the quality division saw the section's struggles, which included capacity issues causes by staffing and a sometimes remote and rotating

schedule. Ms. Ziemak said the blind quality control goals were met in January 2021. She said an article was published in the Forensic Science Review Journal titled “Ups and Downs of a Blind Quality Program - HFSC’s Perspective.” The article focused on HFSC’s blind quality control and transcript review programs, lessons learned and future endeavors. Ms. Ziemak said a digital and multimedia analyst discovered a blind case when they thought the request was too tidy in comparison to what’s typically submitted to the section. A forensic biology/DNA blind was discovered after an analyst noticed the submitting investigator’s submission did not match the overall theme of what they are used to seeing from that particular individual. A firearms examiner discovered a blind when they received an item of evidence that was submitted as bullet fragments but contained intact bullets. The examiner said the terminology used in the case compared to the actual item of evidence pointed to a rookie mistake that most investigators would not make. A latent print processor incorrectly identified a real burglary case as a blind. The case contained only \$1, which seemed odd to the processor since most burglary cases he’s worked include large amounts of money. He also noticed a packaging discrepancy that was out of the ordinary.

Ms. Ziemak said the latent print disclosure made to the Texas Forensic Science Commission involving documentation received no further action at the January meeting. HFSC received feedback that the lab did everything necessary to resolve the nonconformance. The quality division oversaw a 95-case audit of the technical reviewer’s work involved in the disclosure, and the examiner was removed from casework, retrained, and the original case referred to in the disclosure was assigned to a supervisor, amended and reissued. Ms. Ziemak said HFSC received a quality-related complaint about the forensic biology/DNA section and the quality division concluded that the complaint is unsubstantiated. The complaint focused on the screening process in the forensic biology/DNA section. Ms. Ziemak explained that the screening process occurs evidence comes through lab and is examined for touch or contact DNA. The item is then swabbed, or a cutting is taken from the item of evidence and then submitted to a DNA analyst who then attempts to create a DNA profile or screen for biological fluid. If the evidence is positive for the presence of biological fluid, the item moves on to DNA analysis so an analyst can attempt to make a DNA profile. The complaint focused on items of evidence that were screened and came back negative, which means the evidence will no longer be processed after that step. The complaint allowed the section to focus on the screening process workflow, particularly negative result cases, and the risk involved in that process. Ms. Ziemak said process improvements will be made in order to resolve the complaint, and the quality division will audit previous casework in the section, focusing on negative cases. The quality division contacted the Harris County District Attorney’s Office to make them aware of the audit and asked for their input regarding the cases selection process. After their input is received, HFSC will recall evidence and begin the reexamination process. Director Cohen asked who made the complaint. Ms. Ziemak said a previous employee reached out to a current employee who initiated the complaint. She added that she will update the board throughout the entire process. Director Blancett asked how many cases the lab expected to audit. Ms. Ziemak said they were aiming for a statistically significant number, roughly 150-175 cases, and that they would also work to target 15 percent of each analyst’s casework. She added that the goals are subject to change as they assess the forensic biology/DNA section’s capacity. Director Blancett asked if the audit would have an impact on the section’s turnaround time. Dr. Castillo said they have not looked that yet, but the audit process will look into a DNA processing step that currently has a six-day turnaround time. Ms. Ziemak added that an exact audit deadline has not been determined yet either. Chairwoman Mitchell asked if there would be any budget or

supply impacts from this audit. Ms. Ziemak said she did not have any hard costs yet, but the work will be filtered through regular casework.

Ms. Ziemak said in February 2020, a survey link was added to HFSC emails 43 responses were received in 2020: 32 satisfied or very satisfied, four neither satisfied nor dissatisfied and seven dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. She highlighted a negative review received for the digital and multimedia section that pointed out miscommunication between HPD and the section regarding the scene call-out process. It was discovered that in 2018, HPD crafted memo that outlined criteria for callouts had not been recirculated to new investigators since its initial release. HFSC revised the memo and it was recirculated by HPD again.

Ms. Ziemak said there was not a lot going on this year yet for proficiency testing. She said all proficiency tests were released as expected in 2020. She said unexpected results were obtained on a presumptive proficiency test for blood by a CSI. The external proficiency test had six samples, and three were reported as negative that should have been positive. The CSI noted chemical foaming during the test, which was out of the ordinary. CSU removed the chemical from service and replaced it for all CSIs. The CSI performed a second test created internally and he reported negative results that should have been positive. The quality division performed an audit on the CSI's previous cases and identified one case that could've potentially been impacted. The three items of evidence reported as negative in the case were not collected from the scene. The quality division contacted the Harris County District Attorney's Office to give them a final quality investigation report, and they will determine if case was impacted. The CSI has passed a competency test for the test and will be re-authorized to perform the test on cases again.

Ms. Ziemak said the transcript review project began in 2018 and since the start of the program, 59 transcripts had been reviewed. 18 of those transcripts belonged to the forensic biology/DNA section. Only two toxicology and three latent print transcripts have been reviewed. Ms. Ziemak said 25 analysts testified and monitored by a technical expert in 2020. No analysts testified in January 2021.

Q. Ms. Carina Haynes, acting crime scene unit director, introduced herself to the board. Ms. Haynes is a certified crime scene analyst through the International Association for Identification (IAI) and began her career in 2009 with the Durham Police Department. Prior to her 2017 departure, she was the acting CSU supervisor for 16 CSIs. Ms. Haynes relocated to Houston and became the first civilian supervisor in CSU in January 2017. She was the administrative supervisor for CSU prior to taking on her new role, and was responsible for overseeing field training CSIs, interacting with the quality division to discuss workflows and new policies and procedures and responding to major scenes. Ms. Haynes said the unit's callouts in January 2021 were slightly lower than January 2020 numbers, but that did not reflect the amount of work the unit still struggles to keep up with. There was a slight increase in death investigations and officer involved shootings, and the homicide and vehicle examination requests remained about the same. Ms. Haynes said scenes like officer involved shootings, homicides and vehicle examination requests require about four to five processing hours, though some vehicles can take multiple days.

Ms. Haynes said CSU has four supervisors, all new, and 19 CSIs who can respond to scenes independently, in addition to another nine CSIs currently in training. Three of the nine trainees,

who trained at the National Forensic Academy (NFA) in Tennessee, should be authorized for independent casework by mid-February, which will increase the unit's capacity to 22 CSIs. Two more CSIs, who also attended the NFA, will begin supervised casework at the vehicle examination building. The two CSIs returned from training around Thanksgiving and dealt with delays due to the holidays and quarantine requirements but have since returned to their normal five-month training schedule. In January, two CSIs with previous experience began at HFSC and are in competency testing to ensure they are well-versed in HFSC's procedures. Two trainees currently at the NFA and scheduled to be back in Houston in March to begin training with HFSC, while another trainee was sent to the NFA at end of March. Another two CSIs have since been hired and are scheduled to come to Houston for a few weeks then begin NFA training.

Ms. Haynes said she is working to help build staff morale by addressing concerns the unit has control over. She said CSU's scheduling has been arranged out of necessity to ensure 24/7 operations for the City of Houston. The CSIs selected a new schedule that went into effect February 6 that allows staff to have more consistent days off, have one overlap day on Thursday so all CSIs can be in the office at once to allow for better communication and regular meetings, and enjoy regular weekends off. CSIs were also allowed to switch cubicles based on seniority so everyone can select where they want to sit. Ms. Haynes said the CSIs enjoy the unit's new trucks that are outfitted for consistency, are reliable and accommodate height differences.

Ms. Haynes said a process improvement project in CSU will help the unit streamline processes and create efficiencies. She said she wants to ensure the four new supervisors in the unit are trained and prepared for their new role, and that a quality project will require them to look at closed corrective action reports from 2020 to determine which ones caused policy changes. This will help understand the root cause of issues that occurred in the unit and also explain the "why" behind the policies too. Ms. Haynes said the unit is working to reduce the turnaround time on reports, and that the process is bottlenecked right now because only two supervisors are completing reviews for over 25 CSIs. The new supervisors will be trained on the review process. Ms. Haynes said although CSU is taking an extended amount of time to release reports, detectives are still receiving information in a timely manner. She added that if a report is needed faster, they can expedite the request. Ms. Haynes said the unit established a new on-call schedule that allows supervisors more rest time so they're not answering phone calls on their days off. She said in addition to the three shift supervisors, one supervisor is now a training supervisor who will be responsible for all new trainees coming into CSU to ensure they successfully complete their training program in a timely manner.

- R. Ms. Donna Eudaley, manager of the firearms section, told the board that she began working with the lab in the summer of 2002 in the centralized evidence receiving section. At the end of 2004, she joined firearms and started as a NIBIN technician, and became a firearms examiner in 2007. Ms. Eudaley was promoted to a supervisor role in 2013, and then manager in late 2017. Ms. Eudaley said there has been a significant month-to-month increase in firearms received. In December 2020, the section received over 600 guns, a massive increase from 261 firearms received in February 2019. Ms. Eudaley reviewed the basics of NIBIN and IBIS, the integrated ballistic identification system that is used to put images into the NIBIN network run by the United States Bureau of Alcohol, Tobaccos, Firearms and Explosives (ATF.) She explained that the system uses an algorithm to return the closest candidates for submitted

evidence to determine a match, similar to forensic biology's CODIS. A trained person must look through results, or correlations, to determine if the correlations have any potential matches. She added that the ATF requires a lab to review the top 30 correlations, and HFSC reviews the top 50. In order to issue a lead, an examiner must examine the potential matches under a microscope to determine a possible identification, or potential match. The ATF has minimum required operating standards, or MROS. Ms. Eudaley walked the board through each step as follows: Step one is to receive, process and image evidence within two days. Second is to review correlations within two days. And lastly, if a NIBIN lead is found, the agency must receive the lead within one day, or the fifth day in the overall process. Ms. Eudaley said in Houston, HFSC and HPD participate in NIBIN entries for the City of Houston. After a crime takes place, then evidence is collected either by CSU or HPD. If bullets are collected from a scene, they are not imaged and do not have a purpose when it comes to NIBIN. However, if cartridge casings are collected and are not biologically contaminated with bodily fluids, they are processed at the HPD property room where they are imaged and then sent to the NIBIN National Correlation and Training Center in Huntsville, Alabama, who then reviews their correlations and issues their leads. If cartridge casings or firearms are collected from a scene and are a biohazard, they are submitted to HFSC to go through the entire process.

Ms. Eudaley explained the firearms section's workflow. When a firearm is received, it is processed and test-fired which creates two prongs: Evidence documentation that is generated and reviewed resulting in a NIBIN notification issued to stakeholders and NIBIN image correlations that must be reviewed so leads can be issued. Ms. Eudaley said the firearms section has one manager, one supervisor, three NIBIN technicians who work on firearms and image test fires, one NIBIN technician that reviews correlations and issues leads, and nine firearms examiners that review NIBIN work, issue leads and review NIBIN correlations. She said one NIBIN technician recently resigned.

Ms. Eudaley said from February 2019 to December 2020, the trend in the number of firearms completed went up and down, but overall there is an increase in the number of firearms being received. In January 2021, the section received 500 guns, and about 10 percent of those cases had leads issued, which creates more reviews for the section. From 2010-2014, a steady trend of firearms was received year-over-year. A steady increase was seen from 2014-2015, and then the number of firearms submitted leveled out again from 2018-2019. In 2020, the number of firearms increased, though Ms. Eudaley said it is too soon to tell what is causing the increase in crime or whether the number of submissions will level out again. She said the section is keeping up with the incoming casework, though the pandemic forcing the section to operate at half-staff impacted the section. Ms. Eudaley said that firearms examiners work on NIBIN reviews at home only, which has caused the turnaround time to drop. The section has seen an upward trend in firearms received over last few months. She noted that the holidays had some impact, but more so the increased number of guns received. Ms. Eudaley said overage hours, which includes overtime and holiday time pay, increased from October through December, which was somewhat expected because of the holidays. She said the overage hours can present problems, such as potential staff burnout and turnover, financial expenses and limited time to train staff to take on more duties and receive development opportunities.

- S. Chairwoman Mitchell requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Moore made a motion to adjourn. Director Cohen second the motion. The meeting ADJOURNED at approximately 12:02 p.m.

By: Jordan Benton
Jordan Benton Secretary