



Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

Board of Directors

Virtual Meeting

~ Minutes ~

Friday, September 10, 2021

www.houstonforensicscience.org

1. **CALL TO ORDER:**

At 9 a.m., Board Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell called the meeting to order.

The Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc. (“HFSC” and/or the “corporation”) board of directors (the “board”) convened this hybrid meeting on Friday, September 10, 2021 in the City Hall Council Annex Chamber, 900 Bagby St. (public level), Houston, Texas 77002 and via Microsoft Teams. 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 September 7.

2. **ROLL CALL:**

The following board members were present in-person:

Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell
Philip Hilder
Vanessa Goodwin
Ellen Cohen
Lois Moore
Vicki Huff

The following board members were present via teleconference:

Anna Vasquez
Francisco Medina

The following board members were absent:

Vice Chairwoman Mary Lentschke
Tracy Calabrese

Chairwoman Mitchell declared a quorum was present.

3. **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Chairwoman Mitchell gave members of the public an opportunity to address the board. No members of the public addressed the board.

4. **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF MINUTES FROM PRIOR MEETING:**

Following a motion by Director Lois Moore and seconded by Director Philip Hilder, the board unanimously approved the August 13, 2021 meeting minutes.

5. **CHAIRWOMAN MITCHELL’S REPORT**

The chairwoman first acknowledged the 20th anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001, the date of the worst terrorist attacks on American soil and one of the deadliest days in our nation’s history. The members and Chairwoman Mitchell took a moment to honor the memory of those who were lost.

She also addressed some COVID-19 best practices and guidelines for the first in-person meeting since the pandemic began in March 2020. The chairwoman requested that members wear masks unless speaking. She noted that all presenters would join virtually.

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

Dr. Stout first pointed out that HFSC completed 2,440 requests in August.

He also explained HFSC's staffing portfolio, now with 209 employees and two vacancies. He shared recent outreach efforts, noting his meeting with the Lone Star College administrators. The discussion centered around training new crime scene unit (CSU) personnel.

Dr. Stout later provided a brief update on the potential property room consolidation project. He indicated that space/facility planning and the incinerator are the top priority. He stated these are the most critical and challenging items.

Dr. Stout discussed 2021 legislative bills that could impact HFSC. One to note is HB 3774 which allows the Texas Forensic Science Commission to spend allocated funds on forensic training. This bill also created a new district court for Harris County to address its growing backlog. It's the first one since the 1980s.

He touched on challenges with homicide increases and the strain it places on the crime scene investigators (CSIs). To date, the staff has processed 299 homicides versus 242 at this same time in 2020, a 24% increase. Five of those months had more than 40 homicides. The CSIs also processed 518 vehicles this year compared to 420 this time last year, a 23% increase. One resolution is for the city to provide the lab with more financial resources to keep up with the demand.

7. **VICE PRESIDENT AND COO DR. AMY CASTILLO'S REPORT:**

Dr. Castillo stated HFSC had reduced the overall backlog by a few hundred cases. She noted the seized drugs sections non-marijuana backlog has decreased to 28 cases, highlighting for the past five months the group's output has exceeded incoming requests. However, marijuana continues to be a challenge as 305 cases are backlogged.

The toxicology section has been focused on training more analysts to complete in-house drug confirmation testing to help clear a backlog of 1,603 cases.

The firearms section's has seen a 47% increase in the average number of guns received per month. An additional National Integrated Ballistic Information Network technician started in early September.

Next, Dr. Castillo shared that two new DNA analysts will start training in October.

The multimedia section started cross-training staff in digital and audio/video to help relieve its backlog.

Dr. Castillo explained that the latent prints section implemented a new request process based on findings and recommendations from the lean six sigma team. The new process requires patrol officers and investigators to submit requests for latent lift cards they want examined. The group also added a new latent print support specialist who will help manage its casework. The pilot process is showing promising results and the turnaround time for an analyst to complete a case has dropped from an

average of 33 days to three days.

8. **QUALITY DIRECTOR ERIKA ZIEMAK'S REPORT:**

Ms. Ziemak said the quality division missed one August submission target for blind quality control samples and verifications. The group submitted a manuscript on firearms' blind quality controls to the Journal of Forensic in September.

She mentioned HFSC recently complied to one forensic biology/DNA, one digital multimedia and two toxicology standards in the Organization of Scientific Area Committees' registry.

HFSC revamped and published a comprehensive code of ethics policy that outlines how staff should respond to different situations. Next, Ms. Ziemak said 32 analysts had testified this year, and four transcripts are being reviewed.

9. **ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairwoman Mitchell requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Ellen Cohen made a motion to adjourn. Director Moore seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:32 am.

The undersigned secretary of the board hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the Sept. 10, 2021 hybrid meeting of the board.

By: *Amanda DeBerry* Amanda DeBerry, Secretary