



# Houston Forensic Science Center, Inc.

Board of Directors

Public Meeting

~ Minutes ~

Friday, July 8, 2022

[www.houstonforensicscience.org](http://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 in-person meeting on Friday, July 8, 2022, 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 5.

2. **ROLL CALL:**

The following board members were present in-person:

Chairwoman Stacey Mitchell
Philip Hilder
Francisco Medina
Vanessa Goodwin
Ellen Cohen
Tracy Calabrese

The following board member was absent:

Vice-chairwoman Mary Lentschke
Anna Vasquez
Lois Moore
Vicki Huff

Chairwoman Mitchell declared a quorum was present noting that all members were physically present in-person.

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 Ellen Cohen and seconded by Director Philip Hilder, the board unanimously approved the May 13, 2022 meeting minutes.

5. **CHAIRWOMAN MITCHELL’S REPORT:**

The chairwoman first recognized and thanked the members for their attendance at the meeting.

Next, she reminded members of the next board meeting on Sept. 9, 2022. The meeting will focus on looking at HFSC's progression towards meeting its annual goals and setting new goals for next year. She noted that the meeting calendar was slightly different this year since the board decided to align their discussions with the same timeframe the staff used, including Dr. Peter Stout's annual evaluation.

6. **CONSIDER APPROVAL OF HFSC'S REVISED FY23 BUDGET:**

President and CEO Dr. Peter Stout began by asking the board to consider approving HFSC's revised fiscal year (FY) 2023 budget. He pointed out that the city ultimately decided to keep HFSC's budget at \$28.5 million, the same as FY 2022 in addition to a one-time allocation of \$3 million in federal relief funds provided by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The corporation's initial \$1.5 million award was part of Mayor Sylvester Turner and the Houston city council's public safety initiative, One Safe Houston.

He then outlined the plan to spend the \$3 million in ARPA grant funding which includes \$2 million for training, \$300,000 for overtime in the crime scene unit and firearms, and \$700,000 to outsource toxicology cases. Outsourcing will help the group catch up and ultimately eliminate the backlog.

Director Francisco Medina made a motion to approve the revised FY23 budget. Director Vanessa Goodwin seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the motion.

7. **CONSIDER APPROVAL OF BUDGET MODIFICATION TO THE SUBRECIPIENT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE CITY AND THE CORPORATION:**

Chairwoman Mitchell first noted that the board approved an overarching agreement from the city to receive ARPA federal relief funds at the board meeting in May. She explained that the approved agreement with the city was to allocate an additional \$1.5 million to the laboratory. However, the approved budget amount increased, requiring the members' approval before Dr. Stout could sign the final agreement.

Next, Director Philip Hilder asked how long the ARPA funding would last. Dr. Stout stated that the ARPA funding must be obligated by June 2024, but he anticipates the funding will be allocated by the end of FY23.

Director Hilder made a motion to approve a budget modification to the sub-recipient agreement between the city for HFSC to receive the \$3 million in ARPA funding. Director Cohen seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the motion.

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

Dr. Stout discussed the current challenges with homicides in the city and the workload it places on the laboratory. For example, the crime scene unit processed a recording-breaking number of 85 vehicles in June, compared to 77 in February. He acknowledged that many HFSC sections struggle with significant backlogs but shared that the latent prints section's backlog decreased below 1,500. Last year, the group implemented its lean six sigma project to help improve the processes and address the long-standing backlog of 2,200 cases.

Next, Dr. Stout noted that the quality division wrapped up the annual internal audits on May 27, which help prepare the laboratory for the reaccreditation assessment that occurs every four years. The ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB) external assessment is slated from August 8-12.

He briefly explained the staffing turnover issue in the seized drug section, noting they have added six new trainees. Therefore, he anticipates that the marijuana backlog will remain for another year.

9. **PRESIDENT AND CEO DR. PETER STOUT'S PRESENTATION REGARDING CASEWORK PRIORITIZATION AND RELATED CHALLENGES:**

Dr. Stout first reiterated that the revised FY23 budget limits the corporation's ability to address the growing workload. Next, he addressed the complexities of casework prioritization, indicating there is limited time and staff to fulfill the stakeholder's needs.

He briefly explained the purpose of the discussion, noting that the goal centered around the members better understanding the challenges the lab is facing and obtaining their help in managing its workflow without compromising quality standards.

Given the limited resources, he shared that the laboratory's challenges include demands to expedite misdemeanor DWI cases, the wasted time the analysts spend waiting outside the courtroom before testifying, or hours spent fulfilling document requests for dismissed cases.

Director Hilder asked how the HCDAO sets priorities for its cases and what authority an Assistant District Attorney (ADA) has regarding priority. Dr. Stout stated that no established policy exists at the HCDAO. However, one issue HFSC often faces is choosing which case to prioritize because, historically, its choice is dictated by the prosecuting ADA who yells the loudest. With respect to trials, the judges demand that the state be prepared with their witnesses, and the ADAs respond to the demands by requesting the analysts wait at the courthouse until their testimony is needed. Director Vanessa Goodwin inquired about a letter that HFSC wrote to the presiding and administrative judges asking them to allow remote testimony and for the personnel to be on call. Dr. Stout's replied that the response received was silence. HFSC does not have control over what the judges do in their courtroom, thus it is challenging to make progress on certain issues.

Dr. Stout touched on strains and impacts on the HCDAO, highlighting the 46,000 felony cases backlogged spread between 69 ADAs, which means about 1,000 are sitting on their desks.

In response to the suggestions offered by various board members, Dr. Stout stated the systemic issue could work if routine communication was established between the laboratory, prosecution, and law enforcement. For example, if stakeholders routinely update the system to indicate when a case has been dismissed or needs to be taken out of the queue to avoid unnecessary work. He suggested getting all the parties involved to the table within the next three months to discuss the lab's proposal on case management policy because if the lab can't provide the results, the system stops. He's hopeful that everyone understands the priority of this and the difficulty and works actively in negotiations to get to a solution that works for everyone.

Lastly, Chairwoman Mitchell reiterated that they are at the beginning stages of addressing the issues and pulling the stakeholders in to dive further into the stated challenges. She added that members would continue to work with Dr. Stout, and if the time comes for the board to act or show additional support for any changes, then she's confident they'll be prepared to do whatever is best for the staff.

10. **ADJOURNMENT:**

Chairwoman Mitchell requested a motion to adjourn the meeting. Director Francisco Medina made a motion to adjourn. Director Hilder seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:21 a.m.

The undersigned secretary of the board hereby certifies the following are true and correct minutes of the July 8, 2022 public meeting of the board.

By: *Amanda DeBerry* Amanda DeBerry, Secretary