

State of North Carolina

## FORENSIC SCIENCE ADVISORY BOARD

Raleigh, North Carolina

February 22, 2017

Hon. Phil Berger, President Pro Tempore, North Carolina Senate  
Hon. Tim Moore, Speaker, North Carolina House of Representatives  
Members of the North Carolina General Assembly

### Subject: **State Crime Laboratory Report**

The North Carolina Forensic Science Advisory Board, created by the General Assembly in 2011, reports tremendous progress by the State Crime Laboratory (SCL) over the past three years. The Board has also observed an urgent need for more Laboratory resources. Notable accomplishments by the Laboratory include, but are not limited to the following:

- Case inventory dropped from 52,595 cases in January 2014 to just over 10K cases, levels not seen since the early 1990s. This is an 80% decrease in total inventory; however, the SCL saw a nearly 10% increase in submissions during FY 15/16, the first significant increase in over a decade. Turnaround times continue to drop with the laboratory average now at 180 days or less and some disciplines at 60 days or less.
- Vacancy rate is 9% which is at or lower than other agencies. Attrition rate is at 10.5% which is lower than state agencies and other state forensic laboratories around the region of 11% and 16%, respectively.
- Toxicology Outsourcing has met all expectations and is winding down. In FY 15-16, Toxicology received **6,867** cases but processed **13,499** cases either within the SCL, outsourcing or work being stopped at the DAs request. The SCL outsourced **5,019** cases. The remaining **2000** toxicology cases will be analyzed in the SCL.
- The new Western Regional Laboratory in Edneyville, NC is on time and under budget with an expected opening around mid-summer of 2017. This much needed capital expansion project includes Drug Chemistry, Toxicology, Latent Evidence, Firearm and Tool Mark and Forensic Biology (DNA).

- The State Crime Laboratory has continued to be transparent and accountable by publishing all scientific protocols on a public accessible webpage. Forensic Advantage, the information

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management system, remains an industry leading web based distribution system. Customers receive instant notification and secure access when a case is published. Annual reports to the General Assembly have consistently shown ever increasing improvements and refinements to the overall laboratory system and to the disciplines contained within.

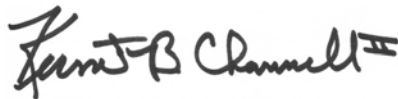
These achievements indicate efficient and effective use of available resources and demonstrate significant, measurable progress in a remarkably short time frame. **The Board is pleased with the General Assembly's 2016 funding for the purchase of scientific equipment and is also pleased with the recognition that House Bill 130 (Funding to State Crime Lab) has brought to both current and future funding needs.**

The Board believes these steps are in the right direction to ensure **a stable source of funding for a state of the art forensic laboratory.** Without these critical resources, the State Crime Laboratory is unable to serve North Carolina taxpayers and the criminal justice system at the highest level. Therefore, the **Board unanimously recommends** that the General Assembly approve and implement the following:

- **Approve House Bill 130, *Funding to State Crime Lab*** in its entirety of \$4,747,460 in recurring funds for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 fiscal years to the North Carolina State Crime Laboratory as recommended by the North Carolina Courts Commission. This bill, if passed in its entirety, will address the unfunded mandates of the 2011 Forensic Science Act, make up some of the receipt funded shortfalls and address the replacement of scientific equipment on an industry standard schedule of five years.
- **Establish Crime Laboratory – Special Revenue Reserve Fund.** Monies from the fund would be appropriated annually to finance non-recurring expenses which include:
  - scientific equipment expenses;
  - private laboratory scientific analysis expenses;
  - expert witness expenses; and
  - may provide contingency funding that offsets periodic reductions to crime lab court fees authorized pursuant to NCGS 7A-304(a)(7).
- **Convert 8.0 FTE positions from Receipts to Appropriations.** Currently, there are three vacant positions due to insufficient receipts.

The board thanks the North Carolina General Assembly for the opportunity to be of service and for its careful consideration of the recommendations herein.

Respectfully Submitted on behalf of the Board,



Kermit B. Channell, II  
Chair, North Carolina Forensic Science Advisory Board

cc: Joshua H. Stein, North Carolina Attorney General

*Replies should be directed c/o Lauren Earnhardt, Assistant Attorney General & Counsel for the North Carolina Forensic Science Advisory Board, Post Office Box 629, Raleigh, NC 27602-0629*