

March 7, 2023

Honorable Senator Whitmire
Senate Criminal Justice Committee
1100 Capitol Avenue
Capitol Office Room E1.308 Austin, TX 78768

Testimony for SB 1319

Dear Senator Whitmire and Committee,



TACLD

Texas Association of
Crime Laboratory
Directors



HOUSTON FORENSIC

SCIENCE CENTER

500 Jefferson Street, 13th Floor

Houston, Texas 77002

(713) 929-6760

This is a very important bill for addressing drug overdoses. What gets measured gets managed. There are striking holes in the ability to follow what drugs are causing overdose and are at risk of. At best we have outdated and spotty data about the flow of drugs in Texas. This is an important addition in trying to get a handle on the problem. But there is also more needed.

Things that are still missing. Texas is a notable grey spot on several federal overdose and drug tracking programs. Particularly the CDC's Overdose to Action program. This is particularly notable because participation as a State could mean federal financial support for both public health and crime labs to expand testing capacity. Encouraging the State to participate in these programs actively and aggressively is essential.

Other notable holes that could be addressed in a bill like this. Very little other than local, individual efforts exist to collect or connect seized drug information from crime labs with seizure data from law enforcement with overdose data in the healthcare system. This needs to be better supported and needs to be Statewide to be effective. Even more, needs to be connected to national efforts to truly be effective.

Additionally, we can see that the wide trend in driving under the influence cases are shifting away from DRUNK driving to DRUGGED driving as drivers get younger. Again, there is no means of linking the drugs detected in DUI's with any other information. Meaning we lose a snapshot of the ambulatory community's drug use. These are people not in the ER's and morgues. Yet.

Labs across Texas STOP testing DUI samples for drugs when we have an alcohol at 0.1 or higher. We know that is what will be prosecuted and we do not have the resources to test farther. So again because of lack of resources, we lose information that could inform health care, policy and grant applications.

As someone who sees the terrifying hazards of the materials flowing through crime laboratories and then the destruction this leaves behind. I am supportive of any efforts to better characterize how drugs move and are used in Texas. We don't do a particularly good job currently. We need to do better. But we also desperately need the resources to be able to.

Sincerely,

Peter Stout, Ph.D., F-ABFT
CEO and president, Houston Forensic Science Center
President, Texas Association of Crime Laboratory Directors