

April 6, 2019

Representative John Zerwas
Room GW.11
Capitol Building
Austin, Texas 78701



**HOUSTON FORENSIC
SCIENCE CENTER**
500 Jefferson Street, 13th Floor
Houston, Texas 77002
(713) 929-6760

Dear Representative Zerwas,

The Texas State Legislature has been engaged in a different and encouraging discussion this session about the budgetary needs of forensic laboratories. As president of the Texas Association of Crime Lab Directors, lawmakers have talked with me not only about the immediate need to eliminate backlogs, especially rape kit backlogs, but have expanded the conversation to consider how we might prevent future problems not only with rape kit testing but in other disciplines as well.

These conversations have led to a proposal that looks at a variety of aspects of forensic testing and, if passed in its entirety, would for the first time allow Texas to not only begin eliminating some of these longstanding problems, but also put it at the forefront of a national conversation on how to improve forensics. The proposal would provide resources and funding to eliminate backlogs, while also creating a path to expand statewide forensic capacity across disciplines.

Now, as the budget discussion moves to the next phase, we need your support to make this dream a reality and to begin putting a dent in a problem that has long plagued Texas: a backlogged crime laboratory system that bottlenecks the entire justice system.

The proposal includes six elements that tackle everything from immediate resource issues to a longer-term need for a pipeline of properly trained forensic analysts. In total, the plan would cost less than \$80 million but could have far-reaching impact on public safety in Texas.

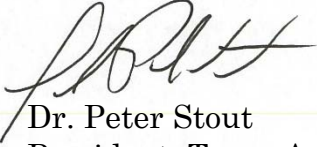
At the moment, some of the items have been put in Article XI and our hope would be to have them included in the budget in some fashion. The most crucial elements are:

- 1) additional funding needs for the DPS crime laboratory system
- 2) a grant program for crime laboratories to purchase non-DNA equipment to increase capacity for testing of drugs and DWI samples

- 3) the expansion of a partnership with UNTHSC to assist with the processing of rape kits and other DNA evidence

A more complete summary of the proposal is included with this letter. We hope to have your support for these items.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Stout", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Peter Stout
President, Texas Association of Crime Lab Directors
CEO, Houston Forensic Science Center

Forensic Funding Needs, Capacity Building

GOAL: Provide funding and legislative solutions that together will allow Texas forensic laboratories, primarily DPS, to eliminate long-standing backlogs while simultaneously building statewide capacity. These budget items will allow Texas laboratories to load balance casework to both prevent future backlogs and use capacity more strategically. The proposed audits would provide the information needed for the plan to work.

- Additional DPS funding, about \$40 million (differs in House and Senate versions):
 - Support staff to allow analysts to focus more time on casework
 - Training
 - Capacity building
 - Backlog elimination
- UNTHSC-CHI partnership with DPS, \$10.2 million:
 - Immediate capacity to take on parts of DPS rape kit backlog
 - Training for DPS
 - Capacity building
- Non-DNA equipment grants for Texas labs, \$9 million:
 - Capacity building so DPS can “in source” non-DNA work to Texas labs
 - No grant dollars available for non-DNA work, leading to backlogs in other disciplines, such as seized drugs and toxicology
 - Backlog elimination
- SHSU to assist with onboarding new staff, training, \$1.8 million:
 - Decreases need to remove existing staff from casework duties to train new staff
 - Creates a “ready-to-work” pipeline from SHSU forensic program to state labs
- CODIS audit (included in proposal to audit five police departments)
 - National DNA database crucial for investigative leads when used properly
 - Inconsistent statewide use, maintenance, upkeep of local database
 - Audit data will reveal gaps, identify improvement opportunities
 - Creating consistent workflows, statewide standards will allow for turnaround time expectation
- Lab efficiency study (\$2 million to \$4 million):
 - Review all forensic labs statewide to learn workflows, processes
 - Identify improvement opportunities
 - Create state standards where necessary and possible
 - Study will allow state to identify and build long-term capacity for load balancing casework
 - Allow DPS to better “in source” incoming and backlogged casework
 - Will help create a plan for eliminating and preventing backlogs