



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Dr. Dana Kadavy, Director, Forensic Science Department *DRK*

DATE: May 27, 2021

SUBJECT: Update Regarding the Creation of the Forensic Science Department
(Ordinance No. 20210204-032)

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a summary of progress made toward transitioning forensic services to the new Forensic Science Department. Based on the progress to date, the City will be able to formally establish the new Forensic Science Department as an organization independent of the Austin Police Department as of July 1, 2021.

Background

On February 4, 2021, Council approved Ordinance No. [20210204-032](#), which authorized the City Manager to create a Forensic Science Department; and amend the Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Austin Police Department (APD) Operating Budget to transfer out funding for 86.75 full-time equivalent civilian positions in the amount of \$11,908,897 (formerly the Forensic Science Bureau budget) to the Forensic Science Department. The resulting Department would be under the control and direction of the City Manager. This change represents an opportunity for the City to achieve a higher level of forensic objectivity and operational independence.

The Forensic Science Department is comprised of the following:

- ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB) accredited Crime Scene, Latent Print, Toxicology, Firearm and Toolmark, and Seized Drugs sections; and
- Five forensic support units, including Case Management (DNA Outsourcing), Evidence Management/Control, Multi-Media, Polygraph, and Quality Assurance.

The Department operates the majority of its services in the laboratory facility located at 812 Springdale Road, while long-term evidence storage and control is managed primarily out of the Evidence Warehouse on Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Progress

Activities since Council approved the ordinance have largely focused on identifying and maintaining the critical systems required for an independent (outside of law enforcement) Department to provide forensic services.

Forensics relies on roughly 15 Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) to perform daily operations (e.g., enter/track evidence, access databases, and safely dispatch staff to crime scenes). Forensics has historically had access to these CJIS systems because they have been a part of a law enforcement agency (APD). Over the past several months, we have consulted regularly with the Texas Department of Public Safety and APD's CJIS Terminal Agency Coordinator, City Law Department, and other experts to identify these critical information systems and take the steps necessary to maintain the required access. The critical agreements that have been implemented (or the existing verified as still applicable), include the following:

- Management Control Agreement (MCA) to establish and enforce security control of CJIS systems under the authority of a Criminal Justice Agency (APD) – Status Complete;
- CABIS (finger/palm print database) Interlocal Agreement – Status Complete;
- Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System Access Agreement – Status Complete;
- Public Safety Radio System MOU– Status Complete; and
- Electronic Data Access MOU – Estimated date of completion June 1, 2021.

These agreements are required prior to transitioning to the new Forensic Science Department and offer an expedited route to achieving systems access. In addition to the agreements, staff are reviewing and updating processes, such as employee onboarding, security training, and access control to ensure policies comply with CJIS-specific requirements. Establishing and monitoring CJIS compliance is an iterative process that will continue throughout and beyond transition to the new Department. These established agreements and CJIS-compliance plans significantly mitigate risk to systems access and contribute to a seamless transition of forensic services. This approach and the progress made to date position the City to formally establish the new Forensic Science Department as an organization independent of APD as of July 1, 2021.

A long-term strategy includes the Forensic Science Department seeking classification as a Criminal Justice Agency. This approach is desirable as it reduces future dependence on agreements with APD; however the additional steps to complete this effort is estimated to be 18-24 months.

An independently operated forensic science department represents an important step toward rebuilding public trust in forensic services and well positions the City to provide impartial scientific and support services to the community and criminal justice system. Should you have any questions

related to the Forensic Science Department transition update, please contact Dr. Dana Kadavy, Director Forensic Science Department at dana.kadavy@austintexas.gov.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager
CMO Executive Team