

Forensic Science Practice Committee Provider Survey Overview July 19, 2022



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Objective

- Assess the status of forensic science in Michigan
 - Survey topic areas
 - Independence
 - Accreditation status
 - Service and scope
 - Quality Management System
 - Broad definition of who a forensic science service provider is
 - Blind spots: arson investigators, traffic crash reconstructionist and behavioral sciences
 - Survey recipients included all LEAs in Michigan, medical examiners, private practitioners, government laboratories
 - Survey initially planned for three weeks, but extended nearly two weeks due to low response rate

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Survey Respondents

- 30 total responses
 - 16 responses from local/county Law Enforcement Agencies
 - 3 responses from state Law Enforcement Agencies (MSP)
 - 7 Medical Examiners, Psychiatric and support
 - 4 Private Laboratories
- First, thank you to those that took the time to fill out the survey and assisted in its distribution
- One way to discuss the survey is to group “like” providers.
 - I will pause at the end of each group for clarifying questions
- Should not be considered a final analysis
 - Learned that several of the questions did not resonate with the respondents (e.g. certification, accreditation, services provided, training not be relevant training etc.)

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The “Medical” Group

- Responses from the following organizations
 - UofM
 - Kent County Medical Examiner’s Office
 - WMU Homer Stryker M.D. School of Medicine - Department of Pathology
 - Mid Michigan Medical Examiner’s Group
 - Wayne County Medical Examiner
 - Center for Forensic Psychiatry (separate topic)
 - Occupational Research and Assessment

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The “Medical” Group-General Observations

- None associated with Law Enforcement
- Some associated with Universities
- Generally offer Disaster Victim Identification, medicolegal death investigation, forensic pathology, forensic psychology
- Consistent certifications
- Vary considerably in size (FTEs)
- Most accredited to NAME (not ILAC recognized), some accredited to CAP
- Generally no proficiency testing or blind proficiency testing program
- “immature” quality management system
 - Some corrective action policies
 - Some complaint processes
 - Some non-conformance monitoring
 - Some peer review, but not extensive
 - Almost exclusively have background case information

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The “Medical” Group-comments

- 1 commented that forensics should not be part of LEA
- Most commented about a looming “crisis” in staffing shortages
- 1 commented that “county” MEs should be required to have annual training in death investigation
- Offer to Task Force to visit and learn before making recommendations
- 1 commented about bias policies “This does not apply to us. We are pathologists, not lab technicians or analysts.”
- Staffing shortages due in part to non-competitive salaries
- “referral patterns of the courts account for a significant number of frivolous orders.” from Psychiatric Hospital

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Private Forensic Providers

- Responses from:
 - Giroux Forensics
 - Forensic Science Consultants
 - Speckin Forensics
 - Primeau Forensics

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Private Forensic Providers General Observations

- All are private providers-therefore not affiliated with LEA
- Most are quite small in capacity
- Most are quite limited in the scope of services provided
 - Each has carved out a niche area of forensics with little overlap between them
- Only one is accredited to a recognized standard
 - Most mentioned accreditation being a financial concern, wasn't a priority
- The three unaccredited providers have an immature QMS
 - Minimal to no PTs, No blind PTs
 - No CARs
 - No peer reviews
 - Etc.
- Most do work for both prosecution and defense
- No comments provided for the Task Force

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LEAs with Little/No Forensics

- Responses from:
 - Mackinac County Sheriff's Office
 - Iosco County Sheriff's Office
 - Clare County Sheriff's Office
 - Sanilac Count Sheriff's Office
 - MSU PD
 - Charlotte PD
 - Leelanau County Sheriff's Office

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LEAs with Little/No Forensics

- All in a Law Enforcement Agency
- Most provide either no forensics, or have a small footprint in Traffic Crash Reconstruction, Digital Evidence, Crime Scene Investigation, etc.
- Have non-existent QMS
 - No PTs, no blind PTs
 - No policies on non-conformances
 - No policies on notifying stakeholders
- Most work exclusively for prosecution and little interaction with defense
- Comments
 - Need additional resources to function, costs are a concern
 - “Give more money to MSP Labs”

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LEAs with Larger Footprint in Forensics

- Survey responses from:
 - Arenac County Sheriff's Office
 - Montcalm County Sheriff's Office
 - Livonia PD
 - Kent County Sheriff's Office
 - Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Office
 - Wyoming PD
 - DPD Lab Services
 - Battle Creek PD
 - Oakland County Sheriff's Office

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LEAs with Larger Footprint in Forensics

- All affiliated with LEA
- The following are accredited to an accepted standard
 - OCSO
 - Battle Creek PD
- Remainder are not accredited
- Offer a wide range of services including LPs, Controlled Substances, Toxicology, Crime Scene Investigation, Firearms, Digital Forensics etc.
- Accredited and Livonia PD conduct PTs, no blind PTs
- For those not accredited, not a priority/funding/resources were a concern
- Some evidence of turnaround/capacity outweighing accreditation
- QMS ranges significantly depending on accreditation status and organizational culture

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LEAs with Larger Footprint in Forensics

- No certifications or licensure
- Mostly work for prosecution

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LEAs with Larger Footprint in Forensics

- General Comments
 - 1 commented “Policies, procedures and lack of resources create unnecessary delays in case turnarounds”
 - 1 commented “Forensic work done too slow won't be relevant to the investigation so much of it is done when requested.”
 - 1 commented in part “...every exam is needed in every case we really need more personnel...Even the defense attorneys will argue that you should have done a particular exam even if it would not have been probative to the case. Our work load in most labs have increased a lot while our staffing levels in many cases have been cut. ...a shortened academy to give them police authority while working scenes but realizing they wouldn't be working patrol. This would allow a certification process that could bring more applicants directly into labs while controlling quality of people doing the work.”
 - Most commented about heavy burdens and needing more resources

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LEAs with Larger Footprint in Forensics

- 1 commented "Crime labs in Michigan at the local level are very under funded and in many cases hampered by union contracts designed for police officers. The contracts often mandate promotion of officers to lab analyst or technician ranks with no allowance of scientific talent or education."
- 1 commented the task force should have contained more local agencies "Involved as many local lab managers as possible because I suspect a much larger volume of forensic work is done at that level that level than is immediately obvious."
- 1 commented "Contact with other labs in Michigan to ascertain best practices and possible new processing techniques/processes"

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Statewide Forensic Service Providers (MSP)

- Affiliated with MSP
- BID, IOD and FSD responses
- Collectively, offer forensic service in nearly all disciplines
- Greater than 350 personnel working forensic cases full time
- Mature QMS
- Policies for corrective actions, notification of stakeholders, transparency etc.
- Primarily interact with law enforcement and prosecution, but do regularly interact with defense
- Commented having difficulty with resources to keep up with technology changes.
- Invited Task Force members to learn more about what they do

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General comments

- Survey response had little coverage
 - A number of providers that did not respond, some with significant impacts
 - Some disciplines had no coverage (e.g. arson)
- Some comments were insightful/thoughtful
- Clear difference between those that are accredited, those that are working toward accreditation and those that are not focused on quality as an immediate concern
- Some commented a survey was not a good method, and offered visits as a better learning tool for the Task Force
- Even requiring accreditation is going to have some significant impacts on services provided (Can the community survive Task Force recommendations?)

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