



National Survey on the Use of Court Fees for the Funding of Crime Laboratory Operations

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INTRODUCTION

With little exception, forensic laboratory budgets have been stretched thin all across the country. There appears to be little optimism that government cash flows will improve in the near term to assist with crime laboratory operations. To that end, alternate sources of funding should be explored. This survey sought to assess how many states have legislatively enacted court fees that are used to enhance laboratory operations budgets, how much those fees generate annually in revenue, and whether any suggestions or recommendations could be learned from states currently using these fees that would assist other states pursuing the idea with their administration or legislature.

OBJECTIVES

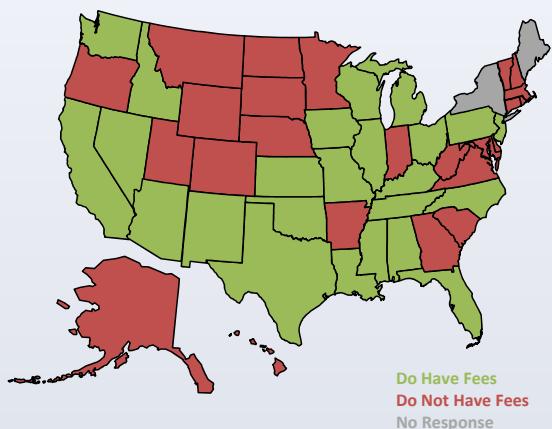
1. Determine how many states have legislatively enacted court fee statutes that finance at least some portion of forensic laboratory operations.
2. Compare amounts assessed for each fee
3. Obtain annual revenue figures from court fees for each state, if available.
4. Compare suggestions/recommendations submitted from each laboratory to determine underlying issues/trends/recommendations.

METHODS

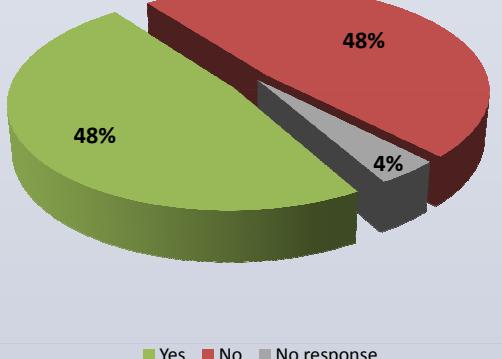
1. A short survey was constructed on surveymonkey.com asking whether the laboratory resides in a state that collects court fees, how much revenue the fees generate, and whether they would like to add any additional information.
2. Emails were distributed to laboratory directors, management, or known contacts of the investigator in every state.
3. Data was collected and follow-up information obtained if necessary for clarification.

RESULTS

Map of States with Court Fees



States with Court Fees by Percentage

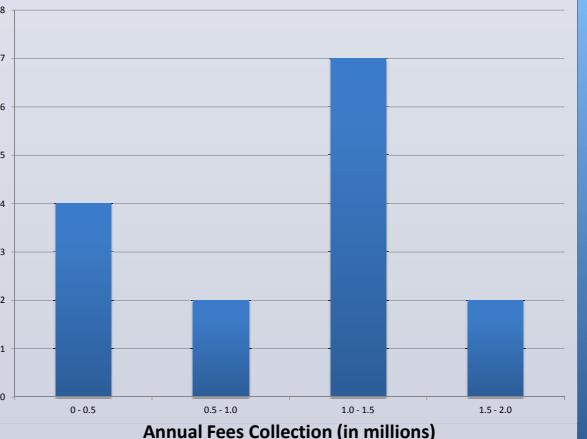


RESULTS (cont.)

Key Statistics

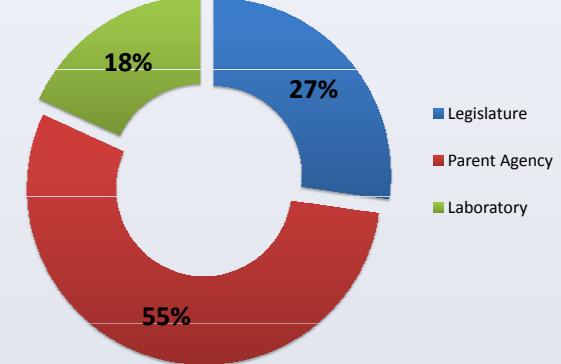
- Average fee assessed: \$148.52
- Lowest fee: \$13 (WI)
- Highest Fee: \$600 (NC)
- Average reported annual receipts: \$978,655
- Lowest reported annual receipts: \$298,266
- Highest reported annual receipts: \$1,920,891
- 19 states have a flat rate charge
- 3 states have a % charge on other fines
- 2 states assess the "cost of analysis"
- 2 states have language that prevents the fee from being suspended by the court (AZ and KS)

Annual Revenue Generated by Court Fees

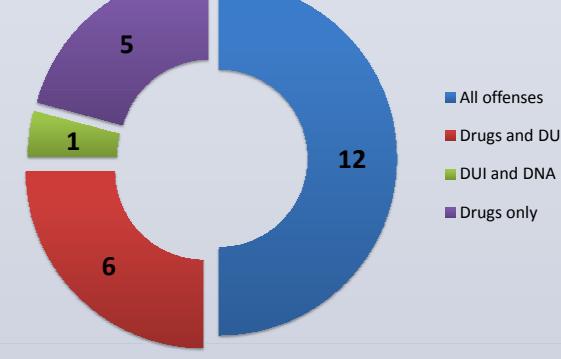


RESULTS (cont.)

Approval of Expenditures Using Court Fee Funds



States Assessing Court Fees by Offense



NOTES / SUGGESTIONS PROVIDED

- 7 respondents described difficulty in getting courts to enforce/collect fees
- 5 respondents described frustrations with collected monies going to other accounts/purposes than back to laboratory

CONCLUSIONS

Court fees are a mechanism by which many laboratories have sought to raise revenues for laboratory operations. There are a variety of implementation strategies and a wide range of collection amounts. Based on all the data obtained, the average court fee is approximately \$150, is assessed to all types of criminal offenses, results in revenue of approximately \$1 million, and the funds are appropriated to the laboratory's parent agency.

FUTURE WORK

1. Assess annual court fee receipts as a percentage of lab operating budgets (better inter-lab comparisons)
2. Question - Have labs with court fees seen a decrease in general fund appropriations since implementation?
3. Identify the states/labs with the most effective collections and offer model statute language to interested parties

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS and CONTACT INFO

- Thank you to all the laboratories that participated and the directors that endured my countless emails and questions
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For questions or copies of information, state statutes, fee schedules:

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