

# CONSORTIUM OF FORENSIC SCIENCE ORGANIZATIONS

APRIL, 2012

NAS plus 38 months

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

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Well as the saying goes, March came in like a lion and went out like a [very warm] lamb, but not in forensic science. Rather it stayed a lion. As congress moved toward a spring recess they left in their wake a sea of forensic science issues. This is not entirely unexpected though, as many things are up for reauthorization and it is appropriations season, so we have been very busy providing Congress with the positions of the forensics community on various pieces of legislation and advocating for funding to be added to the budget for the Paul Coverdell grant program as well as continuing our dialogue with the Senate and House Judiciary Committees on the S 132.

### Appropriations

As you know, the Membership of the Consortium have all signed on to a letter of support to not only add funding to the budget for the

Paul Coverdell Act but also to request that a more transparent and process driven approach be taken toward developing the budgets for the forensic community. Your organization should have already sent you the letter with a request to send to your Member of Congress attached to a cover letter from you, outlining your own local concerns and need for this funding. It is important to know that this is 1) timely and must go to your Member of Congress soonest, 2) it cannot be mailed in the US Postal system as it will never get to the key person. Rather fax it or email it to the appropriate staff in the Member's office and 3) a copy of your cover letter should be sent back to the CFSO so that we can provide it to the key staff on the Appropriations Committee. We have received many of these letters already and thank you for all your efforts and moving so quickly.

### Violence Against Women Act

This legislation when originally passed, as with all legislation, had

a timeframe attached to it. The timeframe is set to expire, so Congress is re-authorizing it for another 5 years and in the process of that, considering new amendments and components of the bill that may need improvement or may not have been included in the original bill. One of those amendments that are being discussed is the SAFER (Sexual Assault Forensic Registry Act) Act. The SAFER Act will provide a national registry for rape kits and create best practices for the processing of rape kits, both in the law enforcement agencies as well as the laboratories. We have been actively engaged with Senator Cornyn's office discussing the goals of this Act and how best to implement them within the operational setting of the crime laboratory. While the discussion is primarily in the Senate right now it will move to the House soon. We will keep you apprised of the details and the progress of these discussions in the event that we need your assistance in providing your Member of Congress any talking points on how it will affect his/her crime lab or law enforcement agency.

### **Justice For All Act**

Although this bill is not formally up for discussion right now it will

be up for re-authorization again and we are told that it will be brought up for discussion in the Senate soon after Spring recess. As such we are reviewing the previous bill and discussing with staff our concerns with Coverdell and other programs on in this bill. On a positive note, we have already been informed that the Senate will attempt to increase the amount for Coverdell funding in this re-authorization bill.

### **Senate Science Committee**

As you know, the Senate Science Committee has also begun discussions on the matter of forensic science. In particular, they are interested in research and standards. Senator Rockefeller, the Chair of the Committee, is expected to release legislation shortly. We have had numerous discussions with the Majority and Minority of this Committee about the positions of the forensic community. We have provided our various organizations' original NAS position papers and responded to questions. The Ranking Member of the Committee requested a briefing from his Crime Lab last month and we were invited to attend. We were fortunate enough to have over an hour with Senator Boozman and provided him an

overview of our memberships' original positions on the NAS study and he is reviewing them and providing questions to us on a regular basis. We are working toward a visit to a Crime Lab, law enforcement agency and Medical Examiner's office for the Committee staff.

### **S132**

We continue to meet with Senator Leahy's staff on his legislation and he continues to listen to our input. As you know, this legislation encompasses issues that affect all disciplines, laboratories, agency operations, and individual examiners. We expect to have the next draft for review shortly and are hopeful that we can help the Senator move it to markup if we are comfortable with the changes that he has made.

As always if you have questions or ideas and would like more detail about the legislation we have discussed please don't hesitate to call or email us.

### **Coming in May: Forensic FY13 budget preview**