



AMERICAN SOCIETY
OF
CRIME LABORATORY DIRECTORS, INC.

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ASCLD Board Comments

Initial Draft Recommendation on Developing a National Forensic Science Curriculum

The currently proposed “**Initial Draft Recommendation on Developing a National Forensic Science Curriculum**” lists a recommendation, a statement of issue and background related to forensic science curriculum. The following are specific comments, issues and explanations along with recommended wording, where applicable, to help provide a consensus document:

The following comment applies to the general principle within the background section of the document:

Comment #1: The wording in the document specifically states that the curriculum must only be developed by research scientists and/or academics. This would be irresponsible based on the amount of misinformation and genuine misunderstanding that exists regarding the forensic sciences.

Issue: The documents states that “*To be perceived as neutral a national curriculum must be developed by entities independent of the Department of Justice – in particular NIST, AAAS, and NAS.*”

The development of an effective, transparent and comprehensive national forensic science curriculum should include many stakeholders with different relevant areas of expertise. Practitioners from the major forensic science disciplines including controlled substances, trace evidence, latent prints, firearms/toolmarks, forensic biology, digital evidence and crime scene as well forensic laboratory managers should be consulted. Additionally, the NAS report specifically cites the need for forensic scientists to be involved in the development and delivery of these education programs. “The forensic science community needs to better educate those who use their services and therefore needs to understand the services and their terminology.”¹ This viewpoint is recognized in the make-up of the Commission. A national commission on Forensic Science would rightly not be taken seriously if there were no forensic scientists and administrators as members. Similarly, a national forensic science education curriculum would be in great jeopardy of not being taken seriously if it did not involve these types of individuals. A

¹ National Research Council of the National Academies. (2009). *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*. Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press., p. 234.

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comprehensive program should also include investigators, prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, academics and applicable researchers.

Further, this document is rather accusational towards the DOJ in implying it's members cannot be fair, transparent or neutral. What evidence is there to make such a claim? Finally, what evidence is being relied upon to determine that a training program must be designed by those outside of the subject matter?

Comment #2: The recommendation calls for an education program in forensic sciences from entities such as NIST, AAAS and NAS. It further defines the minimum topics to include social science. Specifically, how are these organizations being ear-marked to provide social science training? The document also indicates the curriculum should cover the management of FSSPs. The same question is raised, whom is the DOJ to look towards as subject matter experts within NIST, AAAS and NAS?

Comment #3: The 4th bullet point of the curriculum subject matter lists “forensic science services provider”. To be consistent with other documents from the commission, this should be changed to “Forensic Science Service Provider”

Comment #4: This document is silent on Forensic Medicine Service Providers. Is the intent to not include anything regarding training in these disciplines?

Recommendation: ASCLD supports the development of forensic science curricula and delivery programs to educate criminal justice practitioners to include judges, attorneys, and others about forensic science so they are informed consumers of forensic science. In order to develop a comprehensive and meaningful forensic science training and education program for criminal justice practitioners, ASCLD urges the Commission to consider the value that forensic science service providers and corresponding professional organizations such as ASCLD, AAFS, IAI, etc. bring to the development of these programs. Without the involvement of relevant experts from the professions at the focus of the program, the education program will be deficient in addressing the intended need as identified in the 2009 NAS report on education in the legal system.

Finally, the recommendations by the Commission do not address a similar program for law enforcement officials as they are also in need of the same level of education and training about forensic science. In particular, law enforcement officers are often the first responders and responsible for the initial identification, collection, and preservation of crime scene evidence. Without a fundamental understanding of forensic science, law enforcement officials may be under-resourced to adequately accomplish this task.

Impact: Any program of this nature will have to be funded at appropriate levels to be adopted not only at the federal level, but also at the state and local levels where most forensic science is practiced and admitted into trials for use by law enforcement and legal professionals. Without appropriate levels of funding, no training beyond what currently exists at the state and local levels will be effective at meeting the needs of the legal community.

ASCLD Board of Directors

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