



# AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIME LABORATORY DIRECTORS, INC.

65 Glen Road, Suite 123, Garner, NC 27529

October 27, 2017

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## ASCLD Position Statement to the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis

The American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors (ASCLD) welcomes the opportunity to provide critical information to support the President's Commission on Combating Drug Addiction and the Opioid Crisis. ASCLD is a nonprofit professional society of over 600 crime laboratory directors and forensic science managers across the United States and worldwide, dedicated to providing excellence in forensic science through leadership and innovation. The purpose of the organization is to foster professional interests, assist the development of laboratory management principles and techniques; acquire, preserve and disseminate forensic based information; maintain and improve communications among crime laboratory directors; and to promote, encourage and maintain the highest standards of practice in the field.

Forensic science laboratories analyze drugs submitted by over 19,000 law enforcement agencies nationwide. The data derived from analyzing these seized drugs in our drug chemistry sections and biological specimens taken from drivers and decedents in our toxicology sections are of vital importance to policy development in public health (e.g., drug treatment and death investigation) and public safety (e.g., drug control and illicit drug trends). Our member labs have recorded a 6000% increase in fentanyl and fentanyl analog cases from 2012-2016. This increase corresponds directly with the overdose deaths being reported nationwide. Accurate and timely data is vital to effectively dealing with this crisis.<sup>1</sup>

Our forensic science crime labs are also observing the rapid introduction of new drug analogs, which enables criminals to stay ahead of legislators and law enforcement in controlling these lethal substances. Carfentanil and its analogs are 10,000 times more lethal than morphine. Safety for our drug and toxicology analysts is critical as they provide analytical services to support public safety. Laboratories have responded to the increasing lethality of the substances our analysts encounter by implementing additional safety precautions, such as expanded environmental controls, additional personal protective equipment, and naloxone (Narcan®) in the laboratory.

With the huge increase in the number and complexity of cases, our response time in conducting analyses has suffered, hampering the work of the nation's medical, criminal justice, and judicial systems. The fiscal and societal costs of extended analysis times in drug chemistry and toxicology include:

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<sup>1</sup>The National Laboratory Information System (NFLIS) contains data supplied by approximately 94% of all public crime laboratories.

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- Overwhelming increases in the nation's crime lab casework leading to longer turnaround times, higher staff turnover, and cases not being worked (and critical data not being gathered);
- Increased safety risk to first responders, medical professionals, and laboratory employees;
- Extended times before information on the identity of new and dangerous drugs introduced into an area can be shared with health and criminal justice agencies;
- Overwhelming increases in the nation's medical examiner caseload resulting in loss of accreditation, temporary morgues, and autopsies or toxicology work not being completed;
- A delay in the issuance of death certificates and a family's ability to receive death benefits;
- Higher jail bed costs for detained defendants awaiting trial due to court continuances<sup>2</sup>;
- Public safety risks from individuals awaiting trial driving impaired or trafficking these substances, and;
- More property and violent crimes as individuals awaiting trial seek to fund their opioid addiction.

The epidemic of addiction and overdose deaths has been unprecedented. Local, state, and federal labs are on the front line of analyzing the substances that are killing people. Therefore, we urge the commission to include and support forensic science providers and practitioners as part of this vital report and overall initiative. We request that federal funds be dedicated to assist forensic science providers and practitioners in their critical mission to assist in resolving this federal emergency situation.

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<sup>2</sup> *Report on the Offender Population Forecasts (FY2016 TO FY2021)*, Virginia Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security, October 15, 2015, Accessed on 10/27/17: [http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h&sdocs.nsf/By+Year/RD3902015/\\$file/RD390.pdf](http://leg2.state.va.us/dls/h&sdocs.nsf/By+Year/RD3902015/$file/RD390.pdf)