



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF CRIME LABORATORY DIRECTORS, INC.®

65 Glen Road, Suite 123, Garner, NC 27529

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ASCLD Position Statement Parent Organizations of Forensic Laboratories

The American Society of Crime Lab Directors (ASCLD) is a nonprofit professional society of over 700 forensic 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 forensic laboratory directors; and promote, encourage and maintain the highest standards of practice in the field.

ASCLD has released many position statements over the years in support of the National Academy of Sciences 2009 Report: Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward. There are many recommendations in that report, including one that highlighted the importance of autonomy from the law enforcement and prosecutorial community (this is most often accomplished by removing crime labs from under the administrative control of such agencies).

ASCLD acknowledges that forensic science practice was started in and has grown out of law enforcement entities. Many forensic science techniques were developed to aid in the investigatory phase of law enforcement and then were adapted to the role of aiding the defense or prosecution by providing courtroom testimony. A perception exists that forensic science practitioners working in public forensic laboratories are seen as an extension of investigation and prosecutorial teams, not as part of an impartial, unbiased scientific field. Crime laboratories have taken steps since the NAS report was published in overcoming this perception and continuing to evolve. Forensic science practitioners and leadership acknowledge unconscious biases exist and leverage webinars, papers, and conference presentations to educate themselves on bias and human factors. Additionally, accredited laboratories follow accreditation standards on requirements regarding impartiality which includes a code of ethics.

ASCLD believes that forensic science must be built on a foundation of sound science, ethics, and objectivity. Forensic science serves the public and the criminal justice system but should not be influenced by political pressures. Regardless of whether a laboratory is currently part of a police or sheriff's

department, a local or state attorney's office, a medical examiner's office, or any other parent agency; laboratory directors, managers, and employees of forensic laboratories must avoid any activity, interest, influence, or association that interferes or appears to interfere with their independent ability to exercise professional judgment. ASCLD believes that a parent agency must be able to demonstrate that a forensic laboratory has the scientific and programmatic policy and procedural autonomy. This includes the freedom to operate, oversee programs, conduct scientific testing, report confidential results, and testify/provide testimony without pressure from political activity, biased interest, or undue influence. Importantly, a parent agency should be able to confidently demonstrate its support and commitment to providing sufficient funding to maintain and advance forensic services. To ensure the best service to the public, a parent agency should aim to maximize its support to a forensic laboratory while eliminating undue influence or pressure which ultimately will enhance public trust and confidence in both the parent agency and the forensic laboratory.

ASCLD believes that it is not required that a forensic science laboratory parent organization be a police or sheriff's department, a local or state attorney's office, a medical examiner's office, or an independent department. There are many well-functioning structures that currently exist and ASCLD supports those structures.

ASCLD is acutely aware of rising expectations and caseloads placed on overworked public forensic laboratory personnel. Therefore, ASCLD strongly recommends that parent agencies provide assistance and adequate funding for personnel, training, and equipment to perform their independent scientific analyses at peak levels.