



Allegheny County Council

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Legislation Text

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Title...

Proclamation honoring all forensic disciplines within the Forensic Laboratory of the Allegheny County Medical Examiner's Office for receiving accreditation on March 17, 2014 from the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB).

Body...

WHEREAS, on March 17, 2014, the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB) granted the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner Forensic Laboratory accreditation for a period of five (5) years; and

WHEREAS, the scope of accreditation includes all Forensic Disciplines within the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner Forensic Laboratory, including the following:

The Drug Chemistry section annually fields 6,000 cases of suspected controlled substances, mostly involving cocaine base (crack), heroin, and marijuana. Drug chemists have become active in the investigation and seizure of surreptitious drug labs in the area. Their responsibilities include dismantling the labs and securing evidence for further analysis. They are also responsible for running various presumptive tests, to figure out what drug they are dealing with, as well as gas chromatography, mass spectrometry, and Fourier transform infrared spectroscopy to further identify what substances make up the suspected narcotic. In mid-January, a batch of heroin laced with Fentanyl (a synthetic opioid a hundred times more potent than morphine) hit Allegheny County hard, resulting in more than 13 overdoses in less than a week. Within 24 hours, they were not only able to determine that Fentanyl was indeed the added component in the heroin, but determine the stamp-bags, labeled Thera-Flu and Bud Ice, associated with the deadly concoction.

Processing over 1,500 Medical Examiner's cases as well as over 2,500 DUI (Driving Under the Influence) cases each year, the **Toxicology** section of the Medical Examiner's Office is responsible for providing postmortem forensic toxicology as well as human-performance forensic toxicology. Using state-of-the-art technology, immunoassays, high-pressure liquid chromatography, chromatography-mass spectrometry, the toxicologists test fluids and tissues for narcotics, lack of narcotics, volatile substances, gases, and heavy metals. Their work is vital in understanding the causes of death as well as abuse of various substances. This division was instrumental in determining that the rash of overdose deaths in January were attributed to the heroin laced Fentanyl. It has the distinction of being the first and only Forensic Toxicology laboratory accredited to ISO/IEC 17025: 2005 standards in Pennsylvania.

The Forensic Biology section performs serological and DNA analysis on physiological fluids and other nucleated cellular material like blood, semen, saliva, tissue, and "touch" items collected from what are usually scenes of violent crimes. This section provides investigative leads through the interpretation of DNA profiles that can result in the identification or elimination of suspects. This division is a Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) participant and can utilize the CODIS network for

additional leads.

Implementing AFIS (Automated Fingerprint Identification System), the *Latent Prints section* is responsible for obtaining latent impressions of value (fingerprints, palm prints, finger-joint impressions). These prints are then compared to known or inked impressions of a known suspect and examined for specific characterizations for the purpose of identification. Two (2) of the nine (9) certified International Association of Identification (IAI) latent print examiners in Pennsylvania are employed in this section. Additionally, this section had the first female certified IAI latent print examiner in Pennsylvania.

The Firearms and Toolmarks section covers firearms, fired components, gunshot residue, clothing, tool marks, shoe prints, and tire prints. This section, containing bullets, cartridge cases, and shot cases from scenes where a gun was not present, is one of the few Firearms sections that maintain an active Open Case File Search. The Open Case File is augmented by the Medical Examiner's participation in NIBIN (National Integrated Ballistic Information Network). This section was recently recognized by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (BATFE) for their work using NIBIN in generating confirmations of "hits" between fired components and firearms. Allegheny County is ranked third in the nation, only after New York City and Chicago.

Often analyzing the comparison between a questioned item to a known item, the *Trace Evidence section* of the Medical Examiner's Office is responsible for examining physical evidence discovered, hair, fibers, glass, paint, fire debris, flammable liquids, and explosive materials, in cases of homicide, sexual assault, burglary, vehicular hit and run, arson, and explosions. This section also supports many of the services offered by the full service Mobile Crime Scene Unit.

Processing over 400 crime scenes annually throughout Allegheny County, the *Mobile Crime Scene Unit*, using such devices as Alternative Light Sources (ALS), Electrostatic Lifters, and Trajectory Rods, approaches each crime scene in a meticulous manner. Facing situations ranging from burglaries to sexual assaults to murder, the unit's goal is to accurately collect and process any and all evidence from the scene. This is the only ASCLD/LAB Internationally accredited crime scene unit in Pennsylvania.

WHEREAS, accreditation by ASCLD/LAB is recognized by the criminal justice system as a designation that the Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner Forensic Laboratory has met internationally recognized standards and demonstrated scientific and managerial excellence;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Allegheny County Council does hereby honor all Forensic Disciplines within the Forensic Laboratory of the Allegheny County Medical Examiner's Office for receiving accreditation on March 17, 2014 from the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB). **FURTHERMORE**, we thank the Forensic Laboratory staff for their dedicated service and for achieving their high standards of accuracy and reliability for the cause of justice.