



## Jurisprudence Section – 2007

### E12 An Introduction to the AJS Institute of Forensic Science and Public Policy and the AJS Commission on Forensic Science and Public Policy

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After attending this presentation, attendees will learn about the work of the Institute of Forensic Science and Public Policy.

This presentation will impact the forensic community and/or humanity by eliciting ideas for collaboration between the forensic community and the Institute.

**Introduction:** The American Judicature Society was created in 1913 in response to considerable popular dissatisfaction with the justice system. From the beginning AJS has included members of the public, and especially non-legal professionals, in its work to build public trust and confidence in the way justice is administered on the national, state, and local level.

AJS has been central to many of the major reforms in judicial administration witnessed during the past 90 years. It shares in the credit for such developments as trial court unification; merit selection of judges employing nonpartisan nominating commissions; the establishment of a uniform set of rules of trial court procedure; the creation of judicial conduct organizations to enforce rules of judicial ethics; designing methods to address the ever-increasing number of cases in which one or both parties are unrepresented by counsel; and retooling the American jury to preserve its value and effectiveness in determining the facts in today's world of increasingly complex litigation.

AJS's accomplishments are attributable to a few basic ingredients. AJS is non-partisan. AJS takes no position on substantive legal issues, but instead works to make sure that the process of adjudication is and appears to be fair and reliable. AJS is inclusive and transparent. AJS insists that its recommendations for reform rest on independent, objective research of the highest quality.

During the past 10 years, the advent of DNA evidence has proven that the justice system has wrongfully convicted too many citizens. Today there is no debate among reasonable people about whether there are wrongful convictions. Better informed questions are being asked, such as what can be done to guard against wrongful convictions in the future so that innocent people are not prosecuted and the guilty left free.

**The AJS Institute of Forensic Science and Public Policy:** Under the rubric of improving the truth-finding function of the justice system, AJS has established a multidisciplinary institute that will engage in empirical research and education relating to the scientific evaluation of fact issues arising in the criminal justice system. The Institute is an entity of the American Judicature Society, an independent, national and non-partisan organization of judges, lawyers and other members of the public. The Institute will offer research, educational, publication and consultation opportunities, as well as staff positions to scholars and students in North Carolina and elsewhere.

Intended areas of research and study include best practices for forensic crime laboratories; best practices in collection and preservation of eyewitness identification; best practices for interviewing suspects and witnesses; how to improve the reliability of polygraph examination results; and how to prevent confirmatory bias or tunnel vision in the investigations and prosecutions.

**The AJS Commission on Forensic Science and Public Policy:** The AJS Commission on Forensic Science and Public Policy has been established as the reviewing body of the research conducted by or directed by the Institute. The Commission is co-chaired by former Attorney General Janet Reno, former FBI Director William Webster, and internationally recognized statistician and scientific expert Stephen Fienberg of Carnegie Mellon University. The Commission's honorary chair, Dr. Donald Kennedy, is president emeritus of Stanford University and editor in chief of *Science* magazine.

During its first retreat in April 2006, the Commission established five initial areas for the focus of its work: ensuring the preservation, scientific testing and access to evidence; improving the quality of eyewitness testimony; promulgating standards for, and the systematic evaluation of the nation's forensic labs; encouraging research and evaluation of pattern recognition techniques associated with forensic evidence to help solve crimes; and developing mechanisms to improve science education for the legal profession.

The Commission includes 38 leading scientists, members of law enforcement, judges, prosecutors, defense attorneys, forensic practitioners, victims' rights advocates, and academics from around the country.

#### AJS, Commission , Institute