



### A39 Privatization of Forensic Science Laboratory Functions — Caveat Emptor

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The goal of this presentation is to stimulate thinking and discussion about the nature and role of the criminalistics laboratory.

The presentation will impact the forensic science community by making decision makers aware of the negative consequences of criminalistic laboratory privatization.

Recently publicized crises in government operated forensic science laboratories in the United States and the issuance of the National Academy of Sciences Report, "*Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States – A Path Forward*," have resulted in increased discussion concerning the perceived benefits of the outsourcing of sample testing or the outright privatization of forensic science laboratory services. If the perception of the forensic science laboratory as merely a testing facility were accurate, the arguments in favor of outsourcing and privatization would have some validity. They are not, and to proceed in this direction would have a severely adverse impact on the potential of science to serve justice. It would exacerbate an already artificially compromised ability of

forensic science to contribute its full potential to an understanding of the physical evidence record from crime scenes. The physical evidence record can provide the ground truth in criminal investigations. No other source of information in criminal investigations enjoys anything approaching this potential. There is no close second. Unfortunately, this potential is not widely appreciated, and as a result, many forensic science laboratory systems are prevented from contributing what they could due to structural and budgetary constraints. This problem needs to be recognized and addressed. The traditional methods of seeking truth in criminal investigations – e.g., eyewitnesses, interrogation, confessions, etc. are far less reliable than is a scientifically derived understanding of the physical evidence record.

**Forensic Science Laboratory, Criminalistics Laboratory, Laboratory Privatization**