



Jurisprudence Section - 2015

F11 Forensic Science Leaders on the Path Forward

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After attending this presentation, attendees will understand the various efforts advanced by the forensic science community and supported by the Innocence Project that can be implemented by laboratories to advance forensic science.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by identifying and sharing model efforts that forensic science leaders have implemented in their laboratories.

In 2009, the National Academy of Sciences published an authoritative Report on the state of forensic science in the United States. The forensic science community advocated for this Report and leaders within the community began to advance policies and strategies to improve forensic science even before the publication of the Report. While members of this community may disagree on aspects of this Report entitled, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward*, the Report has served to broaden the national conversation on forensic science, emphasize the critical need to act urgently, and has also served as a rallying point for federal resources.

In the six years since the release of the NAS Report, a number of developments have been driven by its release. Eight hearings in the Science and Judiciary Committees of both houses spurred discussions that have resulted in the introduction of three bills in the 113th Congress focused on establishing a federal infrastructure to support forensic science. Additionally, the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaborate in the creation of a National Commission on Forensic Science (NCFS) and a forensic science standards setting infrastructure now named the Organization of Scientific Area Committees (OSAC). The creation of the NCFS was announced in February 2013, its members were appointed, and the first meeting held in February 2014. While the NCFS is co-chaired by NIST and DOJ, its organizational center is within the DOJ. NIST and DOJ are also collaborating on the establishment of the OSAC. Appointments of OSAC members are in process. To date, the appointments have incorporated members of the relevant scientific communities and their standards-setting work was anticipated to begin before the end of 2014.

Many recommendations of the NAS Report, such as research funding and setting national standards, can only be accomplished or are most efficiently addressed at the federal level. Among issues that can be effectively addressed at the state, local, or laboratory level are those that focus on quality assurance and quality control, processes to address cognitive bias, and improvements to transparency. This presentation will focus on strategies that specific laboratories or forensic science groups have developed to address these issues in the absence of national standards and policy recommendations from the NCFS. Among the efforts that may be highlighted are the implementation of root cause analyses, comprehensive reporting, and transparency measures. These accomplishments are notable in that these forensic science leaders are proactively advancing their laboratories' scientific practice which will better prepare them for them for the road ahead.

Policy, Laboratory Quality, NAS Report