

CALIFORNIA CRIME LABORATORY REVIEW TASK FORCE

Minutes, May 1, 2008

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, Scientific Services Bureau
1800 Paseo Rancho Castilla, Los Angeles, CA 90032

Members Present: Dane Gillette (Chair), Barry Fisher (Vice Chair), Greg Matheson, Elizabeth Johnson, Arturo Castro, Dean Gialamas, Robert Jarzen, Dolores Carr, William Thompson, Jim McLaughlin, Jennifer Mihalovich

Staff Present: Colleen Higgins (DOJ-Notes),

Members of the Public: Gabriel Oberfield (Research Analyst, Innocence Project); Mary Gibbons (Director of Oakland Police Crime Lab); Hiram Evans (Supervising Criminalist/Deputy Sheriff, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department); Jeff Rodzen (Department of Fish and Game); Eva Steinberger (DOJ, Assistant Chief, DNA Programs); Kevin Davis (CHP); Joseph Peterson (Director and Professor, School of Criminal Justice and Criminalistics, CSULA); Rose M. Ochi (Executive Director, California Forensic Science Institute, CSULA); Beatrice Yorker, RN, MS, JD, FAAN (Dean, College of Health and Humans Services, CSULA); Lisa Kahn (LA Deputy District Attorney, Forensic Sciences Advisor), Erin Morris (Research Analyst, LA County Public Defenders),

The meeting was called to order at 10:30 a.m.

Minutes

The minutes of the April meeting, were approved by motion and vote.

Administrative Issues

MP3 digital copy of meetings: The meeting was taped with the new recording device in order to provide a complete record of the meetings going forward, and an MP3 file of each meeting will be e-mailed upon request.

Laboratory Director Survey: The survey was mailed out to the laboratory directors last week, with sets of instructions on how to respond and submit, either electronically or by mail. The survey response deadline is August 1, 2008. As the responses are received, a student assistant will extract and tabulate the data as received and provide comprehensive responses to each question, i.e., number of Yes/No answers; narratives; etc. Copies of the responses will be circulated to the members as they come in and members are encouraged to begin scheduling meetings once their lab reports have arrived.

Dane Gillette thanked the members of the Task Force and DOJ "IT" staff for their great efforts and diligence in producing a comprehensive and quality survey instrument.

Attorney Survey: Prosecutor and Defender: The first order of business was to address the concern of Jennifer Friedman regarding Question 12 and include a range. It was agreed to use the number scale, from 1 – 5 with “3” being the clear middle response. It was decided and understood that using a single instrument for multiple responders may result in some “not applicable” responses. Other minor and technical changes were agreed upon, including uniformity in neutral language. Some new questions were added at the suggestion of Bill Thompson. Our expectation is to circulate the new draft next week for review by the members.

California State University, Los Angeles presentation: The CSULA staff presented their suggestions and comments regarding proposed collaborations, education and training in forensic science / criminalist programs, including a degree program, perhaps in both Northern and Southern California locations. The members identified the universal need to provide formal forensic training to new hires. The transition from academics to ‘real life’ work was identified as a key need in bridging the gap. The idea of creating a forensic ‘pre-hire’ academic program, with a focus on real laboratory experience, was well received. Because of the immense popularity of forensic science, the importance of pre-screening applicants for criminal background and other disqualifying issues was discussed.

Bob Jarzen suggested a working group, involving two members of the Task Force to dialogue with CSU, UCD and other academic programs. Bob Jarzen and Bill Thompson agreed to act as the academic liaison, and will report on the educational criteria, developing ideas, resources, curricula models, future needs, funding and SB 842,

Draft Law Enforcement Survey; After a thorough discussion, technical changes and new questions were added. The draft will be circulated next week. It was agreed that the survey will be sent to all Sheriffs, the major police departments, (the Cal Chiefs will identify a spectrum of small, medium and large agencies), and 8 field divisions of the CHP.

Public Attendee Commentary

Rose Ochi, Joe Peterson and Dean Yorker discussed the proposed needs, curricula and programs to be offered by the CSU and University systems. Mary Gibbons summarized the academic discussions by calling for a criminalist ‘finishing school’ and the idea was well received by all.

Gabriel Oberfield further discussed the need for external and independent crime laboratory oversight. All agreed that oversight is a good thing, but that a new governing body was not necessarily the right answer; some oversight bodies actually impede the work of the laboratories. Dean Gialamas and Gabe Oberfield stated they were close to agreement on the Coverdell findings. The pros and cons of whether California needed a new oversight governing body, as opposed to a blend of already existing bodies was discussed. Some feel that California is unique, has many existing levels of oversight

and the oversight should be crafted accordingly. The existing Task Force was suggested as an oversight body.

CLOSING ISSUES:

Gabe Oberfield will send the New York (and other states') legislation creating an oversight commission to Colleen for dissemination.

Libby Johnson will provide information on CAC and the role it may play will be discussed in detail at the July meeting.

Interstate 5 Detour: Colleen will send I-5 updates regarding detours and suggested alternate routes if the Interstate 5 "Fix" near the Sacramento Airport is an issue for the next meeting in Sacramento on June 5. You may check the link now at: www.fixi5.com/

June meeting: Speaker, Barry Scheck. Members were reminded to submit topics of discussion directly to Jennifer Friedman.

New Agenda Items: The members were reminded to submit any new agenda items directly to Dane Gillette or Colleen Higgins in advance of the next meeting(s).

Discussion of the finalized Attorney and Law Enforcement Surveys.

Feedback on laboratory surveys, if any.

For consistency, in July the members will discuss what kind of basic questions all members should ask of their laboratory directors.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30.