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Ribbon Ceremoniously Cut to Celebrate Opening Virginia's Expanded Western Forensic Laboratory and Medical Examiner Facility

(Roanoke, Va.) Representatives from the Virginia Department of Forensic Science (DFS) and the Virginia Department of Health, as well as Secretary of Administration Nancy Rodrigues, Secretary of Health and Human Resources William A. Hazel, Jr., M.D., and Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Brian J. Moran, cut the ribbon today to officially celebrate the opening of the expanded cutting-edge forensic laboratory and medical examiner facility. This expansion to the state facility in Roanoke County more than doubles the size of the existing building.

DFS staff in the Western Laboratory provides forensic services in the disciplines of controlled substances, toxicology, trace evidence, forensic biology, latent prints and impressions, firearms and toolmarks, and questioned documents. The existing laboratory opened in 1995; by 2005, it had reached its maximum capacity for DFS. The needs of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME), which performs autopsies for cases in the western region, had also expanded beyond the building's capacity. In 2009, the Commonwealth purchased the land beside the Western Laboratory and plans for expansion began. The construction of the expansion began in the spring of 2014 with an official Groundbreaking Ceremony held on July 28, 2014.

"All of the Department's scientific staff and analytical instrumentation have successfully moved into their new or renovated spaces," said Department of Forensic Science Director Linda C. Jackson. "The design of the new facility is mindful of the need for flexibility so that we will be able to respond to changes in the future, both to the volume and types of cases submitted, and also the types of instrumentation used to perform the analyses. The expansion provides space for additional staff and forensic equipment, and will help DFS to more effectively manage its growing workloads."

The expansion also benefits the OCME by doubling the number of autopsy tables and expanding their administrative space. "The OCME's western region is the largest in the state," said Chief Medical Examiner William T. Gormley, M.D. "As with DFS, the number of cases seen by the OCME has increased and our need for laboratory and office space has followed suit. The new space will also allow for the installation of x-ray equipment such as Computerized Tomography and a Lodox scanner. When installed, this equipment will bring the OCME in-line with national expectations and the capabilities of neighboring OCME offices, such as Maryland and District of Columbia. Most importantly, it will enhance the overall efficiency of the services we provide to the citizens of the Commonwealth."

The \$34 million project includes a three-floor, 62,000 square-foot addition to the existing 54,000 square-foot building. Approximately 27,000 square feet of the existing building was also renovated. The facility expansion was built to the specifications for Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design (LEED) Silver Certification, which, once certified, will officially make it a green building recognized for best-in-class building strategies and practices.

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