



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
A Nationally Accredited Laboratory

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NOTICE REGARDING FORENSIC BIOLOGY (DNA) WORKLOAD

To: All Agencies Serviced by Department of Forensic Science Laboratories

From: Linda C. Jackson, Director 

Date: January 24, 2018

RE: Forensic Biology (DNA) Submissions and Turnaround Time

The need for forensic DNA testing in criminal investigations is constantly expanding. The Forensic Biology Section received 5,195 cases for analysis in the 2017 calendar year. This represents an increase in submissions of approximately 25% over the past three years and, as of January 1, 2018, has resulted in a backlog of 2,295 cases waiting to be worked and an average turnaround time of 179 days.

There are a number of reasons for these increases. The comprehensive physical evidence recovery kit (PERK) legislation, which passed in 2016 and requires submission (with few exceptions) of PERKs to DFS for analysis, has resulted in a 40% increase in sexual assault cases submitted for analysis. Routine DNA testing, which has been expanded from 16 to 24 areas (loci) in accordance with national testing policies, takes more time to review and report. Additionally, statistical calculations, which are required in many DNA cases, are time consuming, particularly now that 24 areas of DNA are being tested.

The Department has been working to expand its DNA testing capacity. Currently, the Department is implementing a streamlined method for screening PERK evidence to increase efficiency in the testing of this evidence. In addition, during the last half of 2017, there were 12 DNA forensic scientist positions in recruit or in training. This is the largest recruit/training endeavor in recent history, and these 12 positions represent approximately 20% of the Department's statewide DNA examiner staff. Four of these trainees have completed the training with others to follow in the first quarter of 2018. Current scientists provide the training to new staff, which reduces the ability of those scientists to complete casework.

We recognize the impact that increased turnaround times have on the criminal justice process and continue to work to address this issue. As a result of funding included in the Caboose Bill, DFS has instituted a period of mandatory overtime for the Forensic Biology staff as an interim measure; however, it is anticipated that, once the examiners in training are fully qualified and the new PERK screening

method is implemented, the backlogs and turnaround times will be reduced. Additionally, the Governor's Introduced Budget includes funding for a new DNA research scientist to assist the section with validating and implementing new methods to further expedite analyses.

For general questions about the Forensic Biology case backlog and turnaround times, please contact Biology Program Manager Brad Jenkins at (804) 588-4025. For information about specific cases, please contact the Forensic Biology Section Supervisor at the DFS Laboratory that provides service to your agency:

- Central (Richmond) – Lisa Schiermeier-Wood (804) 588-4083
- Eastern (Norfolk) – Anne Pollard (757) 355-5983
- Northern (Manassas) – Karen Ambrozy (703) 334-9743
- Western (Roanoke) – Nicole Harold (540) 283-5945