

# Crime Lab Update

May 6, 2025

Presented by Chief Neil Noakes

The well-being and support of sexual assault survivors are paramount. We recognize the profound challenges posed by these tragic incidents, and we are committed to ensuring that all victims receive the essential resources, justice, and compassion they deserve as they navigate their recovery process.

## **State of the Crime Lab on October 22, 2024**

- On October 11, 2024, 898 sexual assault kits had been tested and were awaiting Federal (FBI) Combined DNA Index System (CODIS) entry
- On October 18, 2024, 190 additional Sexual Assault Kits were mailed out for testing
  - Upon their return and during this time frame, the additional 190 kits went over the 90-day requirement for entry
- The primary cause of the backlog was the lack of certified staff to perform the CODIS review and entry
  - There were 5 vacancies out of 7 positions for DNA entry in the Fort Worth Crime Lab
  - We only had 2 certified DNA scientists to review and enter the CODIS information

## **Key Actions Taken to Reduce Backlog**

- Incentives for lab personnel:
  - Performance-based bonuses were awarded for meeting key backlog reduction targets
  - \$5,000 sign-on bonuses for new-hire DNA analysts
  - 8.5% pay increase for forensic scientists, effective December 2024, to improve recruitment and retention
- Streamlined testing priorities:
  - Worked with the Tarrant County DA's Office to remove cases where testing was no longer necessary (e.g., suspect pled guilty)
  - Reassessed DNA submissions across divisions, leading to the removal of 180 DNA submissions that were for property crimes, not sexual assaults

## **Key Actions Taken to Reduce Backlog**

- Addressed staffing shortages:
  - Hired five forensic scientists to fill the vacancies
    - 1 did not complete probation
    - We are actively recruiting to fill the vacant position
  - All current new hires have prior experience and are progressing through the required FBI Quality Assurance Standards training program
- Secured multiple grants to outsource testing to private labs, expediting turnaround times.
  - 686K Federal Grant
  - 349K CCPD funding for testing and benchmark study

## **Key Actions Taken to Reduce Backlog**

- Partnerships with the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and Tarrant County:
  - DPS Crime Lab in Austin took 50 cases, handling ownership review and CODIS entry
  - In January 2025, Tarrant County Medical Examiner's Office agreed to process five new sexual assault kits per week, allowing FWPD to focus on the backlog.
- Victim communication efforts:
  - Detectives contacted victims with case updates, reinforcing our commitment to resolving these cases
  - Policy change: victims will be contacted for any delay in the testing, and the detective will note the contact in the case notes

## **Key Actions Taken to Reduce Backlog**

- Established one point of contact for the media and related inquiries on the sexual assault kit backlog
- A formal interview was completed between the Police Chief and the media about the sexual assault backlog
- Crime Lab Update(s) accessible to community on front page of [www.fortworthpd.com](http://www.fortworthpd.com)
- Weekly updates to monitor progress and oversight from OPOM and legal
- Frequent updates to city leadership on the progress of the backlog and initiatives

## **Future Improvements & Sustainability**

- Independent efficiency review:
  - We contracted with FACT (Forensic Analysis Consulting Training) to conduct a benchmark study to evaluate the Fort Worth Crime Lab, identify process improvements, and ensure the best practices are in place
- Transitioning to in-house processing:
  - We will continue to outsource our sexual assault kits until our newly hired personnel are completely certified through the FBI
  - After certification, the goal is to train lab personnel to handle all sexual assault kit testing internally, eliminating outsourcing
  - This will enhance efficiency, accountability, and continuity—one forensic scientist will oversee a kit from start to finish



## Summary

- As of April 15, 2025, our sexual assault kit backlog has been eliminated, and we are in compliance with the 90-day state submission requirement
- Strategic partnerships, staffing solutions, and process improvements have been instrumental in our success
- Moving forward, the department is committed to maintaining compliance, improving efficiency, and ensuring justice for victims

# Questions