



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Rey Arellano, Assistant City Manager

DATE: February 3, 2021

SUBJECT: Creation of the Forensic Science Department, Agenda Item #32

At your February 4, 2021 meeting, Council will consider Item #32, a proposed ordinance that, if approved, creates a Forensic Science Department under the control and direction of the City Manager. The proposed change is consistent with the Reimagining Public Safety Decoupling framework and transfers the Austin Police Department (APD) Forensic Science Bureau funding and positions to the new, independent Forensic Science Department to be led by Dr. Dana Kadavy, the current Executive Director of the nationally accredited laboratory.

The proposed restructuring is an opportunity for the City to achieve a higher level of forensic objectivity and operational independence in alignment with recommendations included in the [Quattrone Report](#)'s comprehensive review of the Austin Police Department DNA Lab. Those findings were released in October 2020.

The Quattrone report identified independence as one of the four framework ideals of a "utopian crime lab," and suggested that meeting this foundational element increases the probability of an effective and efficient crime lab. Furthermore, the proposed ordinance is consistent with the National Academy of Science's report "Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States; A Path Forward" (<https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/228091.pdf>), which states:

"Scientific and medical assessment conducted in forensic investigations should be independent of law enforcement efforts either to prosecute criminal suspects or even to determine whether a criminal act has indeed been committed. Administratively, this means that forensic scientists should function independently of law enforcement administrators. The best science is conducted in a scientific setting as opposed to a law enforcement setting. Because forensic scientists often are driven in their work by a need to answer a particular question related to the issues of a particular case, they sometimes face pressure to sacrifice appropriate methodology for the sake of expediency."

An independently operated forensic department represents an important step toward rebuilding public trust in forensic services and well-positions the City to provide impartial scientific and support services to the Community and criminal justice system.

The City Manager's Office and APD are working together to ensure a seamless transition of Forensic Science Bureau operations to the Forensic Science Department. The restructuring will not impact the status of Forensic Science Bureau personnel as City of Austin employees or the services they provide. The staff will remain a vital resource to the criminal justice system and the community, and funding levels will remain the same. Support Services will continue to be provided through the police and other City departments.

cc: Spencer Cronk, City Manager
CMO Executive Team
Chief Brian Manley, Austin Police Chief
Dr. Dana Kadavy, APD Forensic Science Bureau Director