Minutes of the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee

February 27, 2015

Delaware State Police Troop 2

100 LaGrange Avenue

New Castle, DE 19702

Conference Room

Committee Members Present:

Major John Evans Delaware State Police – chairman

Lisa Schwind Public Defender’s Office Forensic Attorney

Kathleen Jennings Attorney General’s Office – State Prosecutor

Dr. Don Lehman Univ. of Delaware – Associate Professor

Lisa Morris Dept. of Justice – General Counsel

Amrita Lal-Paterson Division of Forensic Science – DNA Technical Leader

Committee Members Excused:

Jessica Smith Division of Forensic Science – Chief Forensic Toxicologist

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Major Evans. Introductions were made and each attendee gave a brief synopsis of their background and area of expertise.

Major Evans stated that the committee is a sub-committee to the Commission on Forensic Science , which was created due to the resulting investigation, which revealed in part that drug evidence had been compromised at the Medical Examiner’s Office last year. The committee is tasked with developing an infrastructure to provide an efficient and timely process of forensic service in Delaware. Recommendations coming from the committee will be presented to the Commission to be included in a report to the Governor at the end of the year.

Lisa Schwind led a discussion on the current Medical Examiner’s building which was built in the early 1970’s. The building is old, dingy and conditions are not suitable to provide space for expansion to incorporate the amount of work that needs to be done. Ventilation is sub-par. There is no accessible area for the public to view a body for identification purposes. Amrita Lal-Paterson gave an assessment of the computer and IT systems in the building.

Major Evans said we need to outline key objectives and action items for the committee to address. They are as follows:

1. Building efficiency with a focus on design, work capacity and environment, parking lot, IT issues, etc.
2. Andrews International assessment report and follow-up report. These two reports will be distributed to committee members by Major Evans for everyone to read.
3. Synergy between forensic science disciplines. Lisa Schwind said there is a need for “one stop evidence collection”. Kathy Jennings added that outsourcing has caused a delay in prosecution. We need to review the cost of not centralizing and outsourcing versus the cost of having everything under one roof.
4. Bar coding of evidence. This is currently underway with the Secretary. Funding has been allocated but we need buy-in from Police Chiefs from the smaller agencies. This system will be used for all evidence. Amrita Lal-Paterson discussed Justice Trax and the Beast – which are two new technologies for evidence tracking versus using FlIMS which has no customer support. Everyone will need to utilize the same tracking system.
5. The need to codify the relationship between DFS and Dept. of Health. Kathy Jennings asked if we need a new law or a MOU. Lisa Morris is to check on this.
6. Discussion on developing internships with the universities. Del State has one in place. Dr. Lehman will research internship possibilities with the University of Delaware.
7. Staff retention and pay parity was discussed. Lisa Schwind said it is not comparable to other areas. Kathy Jennings agreed and said we need to compare with other government labs.
8. Pending legislation for offender DNA collection and retention. There is a move to collect DNA from all felony offenders at time of arrest. Amrita Lal-Paterson indicated we would need more staff for processing. There are storage issues that go along with this.
9. Lisa Schwind said we are 1 of 9 states without an evidence destruction statute. Lisa Morris, Lisa Schwind and Kathy Jennings to follow-up on this topic.

Open Discussion:

Kathy Jennings presented the idea of going on a field trip to the Maryland State Police crime lab. She said it is state of the art and has a lot of the qualities that we would be interested in including the air duct system. She will check on the availability of doing this.

Amrita Lal-Paterson said we should consider getting some staff feedback about the current building to see if anyone has additional concerns/ideas. Lisa Morris added that the Secretary is trying to get funding for a feasibility study. An outside consultant is needed to determine if the building is even usable.

Major Evans adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m. The next meeting will be in a month sometime before the next commission meeting which is scheduled for April 6th.

Respectfully Submitted,

Donna L. Newth-Showell

Recording Secretary