

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
493 Russell Senate Office Building  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Leahy:

As the President of the American Board of Criminalistics (ABC), I would like to thank you and the other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee (SJC) for your efforts in addressing the recommendations in the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report - STRENGTHENING FORENSIC SCIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES: A PATH FORWARD. This report does indeed define the "path forward" for all forensic scientists as we continuously strive towards self-improvement. We have a responsibility to provide the American public with confidence in the knowledge skills and abilities of qualified forensic examiners. Without continuing enhancements in expertise and the requirements for integrity, the criminal justice system will not be well-served.

Since its formation in 1989, over 250 forensic scientists have served on the ABC Board of Directors, the Examination Committee, the Proficiency Committee and other peer review groups who developed the certification examinations. These professionals come from a cross-section of working criminalists, supervisors and directors employed by public and private sector laboratories throughout the United States. The ABC has certified more than 1100 criminalists, and was the first certification body recognized by the Forensic Specialties Accreditation Board (FSAB). FSAB was formed in 2000 with support from the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the National Institute of Justice to legitimize forensic science certification bodies.

Professional certification is one of the most important aspects of the "path forward" and is addressed in Chapter 7 of the NAS report. The ABC endorses and supports the required certification of forensic scientists by a recognized body. Certification should be a requirement for an "expert witness" to testify in any court in the United States, and is one more step in developing public confidence in the expectation that forensic scientists are knowledgeable and trustworthy.

Although forensic scientists work in federal, state, and local government forensic science laboratories throughout the United States, many are not certified. ABC will work diligently to encourage and promote the certification of criminalists in our nation's crime laboratories. Certifying examinations by the ABC include: drug analysis, molecular biology, fire debris, trace paint and polymers, trace hairs and fibers, and comprehensive criminalistics. Other certifying bodies are responsible for disciplines including but not limited to: latent print examinations, firearms and toolmarks examinations, question document examinations and toxicology analysis.

The ABC will ensure that the certification recommendations in the NAS report are acted upon and that the current program is continuously enhanced to provide the criminal justice system with the most qualified personnel possible. Precisely because our criminal justice system depends so heavily upon forensic science today, it is imperative that forensic scientists who perform the testing and analysis be certified in their disciplines. I welcome the opportunity to address the SJC to further discuss the need for certification in forensic science laboratories.

Sincerely,

Desiree A. Reid, F-ABC  
President  
American Board of Criminalistics