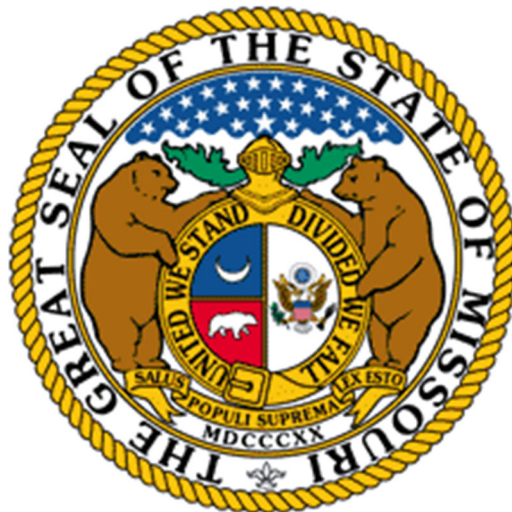


**State of Missouri**  
**Department of Public Safety**

**Crime Laboratory Review Commission**



**2023 Annual Report**

**February 2024**

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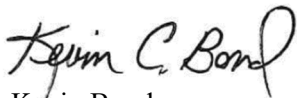
## FOREWORD

The Missouri Crime Laboratory Review Commission (hereafter “Commission”) was established within the Department of Public Safety to provide independent review of any state or local Missouri crime laboratory receiving state-administered funding. In addition, the Commission is tasked with assessing the capabilities and needs of Missouri’s crime laboratories, as well as their ability to deliver quality forensic services in a timely manner to the law enforcement agencies in the state of Missouri.

A recurring recommendation of the Crime Laboratory Review Commission has been the need for more funding for Missouri’s crime laboratories to reduce the backlog and assist with case triage. The Missouri State Highway Patrol Crime Laboratory anticipates breaking ground in February 2024 on its new State Crime Lab in Jefferson City with completion scheduled in 2026. Additionally, the St. Louis County Police Department Crime Lab is exploring construction of a new crime laboratory facility and the St. Charles County Police Department Criminalistics Laboratory plans on expanding their current facility in the next couple of years. The Commission is also aware of the Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office’s plans for construction of a new crime laboratory in Pevely.

The 2023 Annual Report is a comprehensive report summarizing the activities of the Commission during calendar year 2023.

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## **SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES**

The Missouri Crime Lab Review Commission (hereafter “Commission”) was established in 2009, pursuant to House Bill 62, within the Department of Public Safety to provide independent review of any state or local Missouri crime laboratory receiving state-administered funding.

Pursuant to 690.059 RSMo, the Commission shall have the power to:

- (1) Assess the capabilities and needs of Missouri crime laboratories, as well as their ability to deliver quality forensic services in a timely manner to law enforcement agencies in the state of Missouri;
- (2) Authorize independent external investigations into allegations of serious negligence or misconduct committed by employees or contractors of a crime laboratory substantially affecting the integrity of forensic results. The commission shall solicit input and guidance from any appropriate expert as it deems necessary in the investigation process;
- (3) Appoint members to inspection or investigative teams to assist in carrying out the duties described in subdivisions (1) and (2) of this subsection;
- (4) Issue reprimands to crime laboratories and to employees or contractors of crime laboratories found to be negligent or engaging in misconduct in the execution of their responsibilities;
- (5) Make recommendations for changes in procedure of crime laboratories found to be negligent in the execution of their responsibilities; and
- (6) Issue reports to the director of the department of public safety summarizing any findings of negligence or misconduct of a crime laboratory or an employee or contractor of a crime laboratory and making recommendations regarding revocation or suspension of grant funding that the commission deems warranted.

No allegations of serious negligence or misconduct were received by the Commission in 2023.

The Commission met virtually on March 2, 2023 and approved its 2022 Annual Report.

The Commission met in person with the Missouri Association of Crime Laboratory Directors (MACLD) at the MSHP General HQ laboratory on September 22, 2023. Topics of discussion with the directors included:

- (1) Changes in forensic services, technology, scientific personnel, and facilities,
- (2) The Attorney General's Office SAKI (Sexual Assault Kit Initiative) grant and laboratory testing of sexual assault kits,
- (3) Challenges in training and retaining qualified laboratory personnel,
- (4) The role of Missouri's Crime Lab Commission and similar commissions in other States.

There was also discussion about the vacant prosecuting attorney position on the Commission. The position has been vacant since Ted Hunt resigned in 2017. The position remains vacant as of the publication of this report.

The Commission thanks the Directors of Missouri's Crime Laboratories and their staffs for their hard work and dedication to using science to protect the citizens of Missouri. The Commission admires and respects the collaboration and shared mission of Missouri's Crime Laboratories to provide excellence in the delivery of forensic science services to their stakeholders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations remain relevant and require attention:

### **1) Continued Improvement in Communication and Coordination Between Missouri Crime Laboratories, Law Enforcement, and Prosecuting Attorneys**

The Commission identified the need to improve communication and coordination between Missouri's crime laboratories, law enforcement, and prosecuting attorneys to help the state's labs make the most efficient and effective use of their limited resources while making real progress toward the long-term reduction of testing backlogs.

Continuing progress on this issue will require 1) law enforcement agencies that submit evidence analysis requests to more precisely identify the investigative questions that forensic analysis of submitted items may help answer in the factual context of each case; 2) better communication between law enforcement, prosecutors, and laboratories at the inception of major cases to more effectively "triage" submitted evidence and make reasoned and targeted requests for analysis of the most probative items of evidence in light of case context; 3) ongoing communication between prosecutors and laboratories after criminal charges have been filed to facilitate timely supplemental analysis requests as contested issues and case theories evolve; 4) timely notification by prosecuting attorneys to laboratories that cases in which evidence was submitted for analysis have been disposed of by declination of charges, dismissal, or other judicial disposition; and 5) regular meetings between top management of crime laboratories and their regional customers to discuss ways in which to enhance the overall ability of Missouri's crime laboratories to most efficiently and effectively deliver high quality outputs to the criminal justice system.

The Commission believes that the statewide and consistent implementation of these five recommendations will help maximize available resources while improving the timeliness and quality of laboratory services.

## **2) The Need for More Funding to Reduce the Backlog and Assist With Case Triage**

The Commission identified the need for additional funding for Missouri's crime laboratories to reduce case backlogs and assist with case triage. Additional funding will enable crime laboratories to more effectively process backlogged cases. While limited federal funding is available to reduce DNA backlogs, sustainable funding is needed to address the backlogs in other forensic disciplines such as firearms, drugs and toxicology. Funding to improve communication and coordination between submitting agencies, prosecutors, and laboratories when evidence is submitted from major cases will enable laboratories to better evaluate requests for forensic analysis.

The Commission believes that additional funding for backlog reduction and case triage will improve the effectiveness and timeliness of the forensic services provided by Missouri's crime laboratories.