

**REPORT OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE**

Efforts to Recruit and Retain Forensic Scientists

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



HOUSE DOCUMENT NO. 72

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2005**



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DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE
A Nationally Accredited Laboratory

September 27, 2005

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TO: The Honorable Mark R. Warner
 Governor of Virginia

 The Honorable John H. Chichester
 Chairman Senate Finance Committee

 The Honorable Vincent E. Callahan, Jr.
 Chairman House Appropriations Committee

 The Honorable John W. Marshall
 Secretary of Public Safety

 The Honorable Sandra D. Bowen
 Secretary of Administration

FROM: Paul B. Ferrara, Ph.D.
 Director

SUBJECT: Forensic Science Recruitment Report

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul B. Ferrara". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

This report is issued in conjunction with the Director of the Department of Human Resource Management to comply with Chapter 951 Item 427.B.2 of the 2005 Virginia Acts of Assembly that requires the Department of Forensic Science to report on efforts to recruit and retain forensic scientists.

"The Director of the Department of Forensic Science, in conjunction with the Director of the Department of Human Resource Management, shall prepare a report that details the Department of Forensic Science's efforts to recruit forensic scientists to fill the positions authorized by the 2005 Session of the General Assembly. The report shall address the fill rate for the positions authorized by the 2005 Session of the General Assembly and any issues, including pay factors, that limit the ability of the Department

to recruit and retain highly qualified forensic scientists. The Director of the Department of Forensic Science and the Director of the Department of Human Resource Management shall report their findings to the Governor and the Chairmen of the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees by October 1, 2005."

Background

In 1999 the forensic scientist compensation plan was implemented with the assistance of an outside consulting firm. This plan included input from internal focus groups made up of forensic scientists at all levels, and representing all forensic science disciplines. A national compensation study was conducted to establish pay ranges. One of the features of this plan was a mechanism to measure and reward professional achievement. The agency was not able to fund this professional achievement program until FY 2004. Professional achievement increases were again approved and implemented for FY2006. The continued support for this program is integral to maintain a competitive salary plan for forensic scientists.

In June 2005, the hiring ranges for all levels of forensic scientists were updated based on current salary data from federal forensic laboratories, the department's primary employment competitor. The agency authorized salary adjustments to mitigate salary compression experienced by existing staff in order to implement special increases authorized by the 2005 session of the General Assembly (Chapter 951 Item 427.B.1.). These increases and the resulting new hiring ranges allow the agency to offer competitive salaries to fully trained scientists without causing internal alignment problems with existing staff.

Current situation

The revised compensation plan, and the ability to adjust salaries for existing forensic scientists, has significantly improved the agency's ability to attract experienced forensic scientists. For example, seven forensic scientists experienced in DNA, controlled substances and firearms examination have accepted employment offers since implementation of the new compensation plan.

The 2005 Appropriation Act (Chapter 951) authorized 34 positions for the newly created Department of Forensic Science. These positions included 30 forensic scientists. The following information summarizes the status of these 34 positions:

Effective July 1, 2005, 18 positions were established that included 14 forensic scientists. Recent graduates of the Virginia Institute of Forensic Science and Medicine (VIFSM) filled the Forensic Scientists positions. The remaining four positions, laboratory specialists, have also been filled. Sixteen additional forensic scientist positions were subsequently established and are being recruited.

Planned actions

The revised compensation plan recommended incremental salary adjustments based on changes in duties as new forensic scientists become proficient and are able to assume greater responsibility. In addition, the professional achievement program, developed as a segment of the compensation plan in 1999, requires continued funding support.

The Commonwealth's reformed compensation plan provides numerous tools and considerable flexibility for state agency's to hire and retain qualified staff. Continued funding support will allow the Department of Forensic Science to exercise this flexibility. The agency recognizes the continuing increase in caseloads due to scientific advances in analyzing crime scene evidence. The ability of the agency to keep positions filled will enable the agency to meet the case analysis volume and to reduce case backlog.

DFS submitted a decision package for the 2006-2008 biennium to continue the funding for all segments of this Forensic Science Compensation plan. This will allow the agency to retain trained staff and to attract new staff as vacancies occur.

c: Dick Hickman
Craig Burns
Marilyn Harris
Sara Redding Wilson
Steve Sigel