

Illinois Forensic Science Commission

Meeting Minutes

11 June 2025

I. **Call to order**

Illinois State Police Director Designee Robin Woolery and Executive Director Amy Watroba called to order the meeting of the Illinois Forensic Science Commission at approximately 10:06 a.m. on June 11, 2025. The meeting was held in-person at the Illinois State Police Forensic Science Center at Chicago, 1941 West Roosevelt Road, Chicago, Illinois. The meeting also was available via Web Ex.

II. **Roll-call**

1. The following Forensic Science Commission members and staff were present:

1. Brendan Kelly, Chairperson (via Web Ex)*
2. Claire Dragovich, Vice-Chairperson (via Web Ex)
3. Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, Member
4. Jillian Baker, Member
5. Jeff Buford, Member
6. John Hanlon, Member (via Web Ex)
7. Judge Art Hill (ret.), Member
8. Jodi Hoos, Member
9. Dr. Cris Hughes, Member
10. Jeanne Richeal, Member
11. Caryn Tucker, Member
12. Carrie Ward, Member*
13. Robin Woolery, Director Designee
14. Amy Watroba, Executive Director

2. Quorum confirmed.

3. The following members of the public were present in-person:

1. Theresa Bogard
2. Maya Dukmasova
3. Gail Gutierrez
4. Megan Neff
5. Timothy Ruppel
6. Amanda Shanbaum
7. Sarah Ware

4. The following members of the public were present via Web Ex:

1. Jennifer Bash
2. Gina Havlik
3. Jessica Koong*
4. Jennifer Maples*
5. Mitra Nourbakhsh
6. Lindsay Simpson

7. Peter St. Andre
8. Timothy Tripp*

*Denotes individual who joined meeting after roll call.

III. **Review/Adoption of the Minutes of March 12, 2025.**

The motion to adopt the Meeting Minutes from the March 12, 2025, Commission meeting was unanimously approved.

IV. **Executive Director Summary**

1. Legal/Legislative Update: ED Watroba provided an update on bills related to forensic science from the last legislative session of the Illinois General Assembly. Most of the bills died in committee, including SB 1889 which proposed amendments related to the definition of Delta-9 THC in the DUI statute. SB 1764 passed both Houses. If the Governor signs SB 1764, new language will be added to the Commission's enabling statute providing that "[b]eginning January 1, 2026, the Governor shall designate the chair of the Commission for a 2-year term." If SB 1764 is signed into the law, the Commission can decide how to put forth a recommendation to the Governor for chairperson biannually, based on discussions at previous meetings. The tracking chart for the legislative session has been updated in the Commission's workspace.

ED Watroba briefly summarized 2 cases where the Illinois Supreme Court recently granted petitions for leave to appeal. *People v. Johnson* (2024 IL App (1st) 220494, PLA allowed no. 131337 (Mar. 26, 2025)), will address the issue of whether reviewing courts may rely on scientific studies or academic journals referenced for the first time on appeal. *Johnson* does not involve forensic evidence, but ED Watroba will track the case because the Court's decision may impact appeals related to forensic evidence. *People v. McCoy* (2025 IL App (1st) 240198-U, PLA allowed no. 131565 (May 28, 2025), is an appeal following third-stage post-conviction proceedings. The legal issue is *McCoy* is not directly related to forensic testing, but ED Watroba will track the case because serology testing may be discussed in the legal analysis.

ED Watroba provided an update on pending federal legislation. The Carla Walker Act was re-introduced in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate in May. The Carla Walker Act would provide funding for 2 pilot projects for Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (FIGG): \$5 million earmarked for testing and \$5 million earmarked for equipment for government agencies looking to bring testing related to FIGG in-house.

Next, ED Watroba shared that pending federal budget legislation currently proposes a reduction in Paul Coverdell Grant funds. Forensic science organizations distributed notifications regarding the proposed funding cut. ISP, NIRCL, DuPage Forensic Science Center, and the Cook County Medical

Examiner's Office all receive Coverdell funds and thus the forensic services these agencies provide would be impacted by the proposed funding reduction. Annual funding previously was \$34 million and the proposed funding amount is only \$10 million.

Discussion ensued about possible actions ED Watroba could take to voice the Commission's concern about the proposed cuts to Coverdell funding, including: gathering information from the 4 impacted agencies in Illinois about how they have used Coverdell funds and how the loss of funding would impact forensic services, drafting a fact sheet and/or letter about the impact on Illinois agencies to send to Illinois legislators, and coordinating with other organizations such as the NAFSB on efforts related to the proposed budget cuts. DD Woolery noted that ISP is facing cuts to several grants for both forensics and investigations and that services will be impacted state-wide for the next few years because most labs receive federal grant funding. The CFSO has encouraged laboratories to reach out to legislators about the impact of proposed budget cuts. Ms. Baker expressed support for outreach and also noted that Coverdell grants provide funds for technology improvements, backlog reduction, and testing related to the opioid epidemic. Losing Coverdell funds will impact labs' ability to acquire new technologies and to meet testing demands, especially drug chemistry testing related to the opioid epidemic. Dr. Arunkumar agreed and noted that the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office has used the funds for toxicology testing. Ms. Tucker noted the importance of targeted communication with members of Congress from Illinois. Judge Hill suggested that correspondence address the downstream impact of backlog increase on the criminal justice system. ED Watroba indicated that, given the status of the budget bill, she would move swiftly to disseminate information about the proposed cuts on behalf of the Commission.

2. Education/Outreach: ED Watroba reported that the NAFSB's 2-day annual conference will be held at the University of New Haven the week of October 20th. Information about the conference is available on NAFSB's website. The annual renewal date for NAFSB membership is July 1st.

ED Watroba attended FIU's 3-day On-line Global Forensic Science Symposium in June. She will forward the links to view the symposium on demand when they are available.

ED Watroba will attend RTI/NIST's *Harnessing Artificial Intelligence for Forensics Symposium* in Washington, D.C. on July 8th-9th. ED Watroba will present and participate in a panel discussion at the symposium on the topic of "High-stakes decision-making and court acceptance." ED Watroba provided registration information for anyone interested in attending the symposium on-line for free.

3. General: ED Watroba shared information about website updates that have been completed and are in progress. The FIU Research Forensic Library link was added to the Commission's webpage under the "resources" tab. She also

explained additional webpage updates that have been requested including information about the Commission Members and staff and the Commission, including links to the Commission's enabling statute and the 2020 Governor's Task Force on Forensic Science Report.

ED Watroba reported that she requested the creation of a legacy email address for the Commission (forensic.science.commission@illinois.gov). The email address is active and is posted on the Commission's webpage. The legacy email address provides a mechanism for anyone to contact the Commission and, since the email account is managed by the Executive Director, it also ensures long-term continuity.

ED Watroba reminded Commission Members that they each must complete 5 training modules in One Net for 2025. She also reminded Commission Members to submit reimbursement requests for travel expenses for FY2025 by June 30th. ED Watroba asked that Commission Members examine their availability for meetings in 2026 in preparation for the September Commission meeting. ED Watroba hopes to provide an update at the September meeting on the timeline and procedure for applications for re-appointment for Commission Members nearing the end of their terms.

V. Subcommittee Reports

1. Quality Systems Subcommittee: Claire Dragovich, subcommittee chairperson, shared that the Quality Systems Subcommittee has continued its work to prepare the 2024 report of significant non-conformities. The subcommittee met four times since the March Commission Meeting. During those meetings the subcommittee reviewed and discussed the responses by the DuPage County Forensic Science Center, ISP, and AFTL laboratories. A report was prepared, reviewed by the subcommittee, and recommended for submission and review by the Commission as a discussion item later in this meeting. Of note, a publicly available investigative report was issued on May 28, 2025, by a law firm hired by the University of Illinois Chicago regarding human testing conducted by the Analytical Forensic Testing Laboratory (AFTL) and allegations made against the laboratory. Upon review and discussion, the subcommittee agreed that the report had no bearing on the 2024 Significant Non-conformity Report, as AFTL had provided a response to the solicitation for information from the Commission. However, upon discussion it was agreed the content raises questions regarding the operations at the AFTL laboratory, which will be discussed at future subcommittee meetings.

Ms. Watroba noted that the annual non-conformity report which addresses the non-conformities reported by 5 labs is a separate discussion item for this meeting. The May 28th report is a separate issue that the subcommittee will discuss at future meetings as a subsequent action, per the Commission's discussion at the last Commission meeting.

2. Training and Career Development Subcommittee: Caryn Tucker, subcommittee chairperson, summarized current subcommittee projects. The subcommittee continues its work on creating videos on the fundamentals of the core forensic science disciplines. The content portions of the videos for Latent Prints and Drug Chemistry are complete. The introductory video is still in production. Once the introductory video is completed it can be combined with the content portions and distributed to the Commission for review. The next videos will be from toxicology, firearms, DNA and trace chemistry. The subcommittee is also working on creating stock images and videos from all disciplines. ISP has a summer intern helping with the project. ED Watroba thanked everyone on the subcommittee and the subject matter experts who worked on the video projects. She explained that the subcommittee worked through issues on review, tech, content and consistency during the pilot project that will help streamline creation of the remaining videos. ISP is creating a microsite that will be used in the future instead of ISP's YouTube channel so the completed videos likely will be housed there. ED Watroba anticipates that the Latent Prints and Drug Chemistry videos will be complete for the Commission to review for discussion and possible approval at the September meeting.
3. Public Policy Subcommittee: John Hanlon, subcommittee chairperson, reported that the subcommittee met twice since the March Commission meeting and focused on three main topics. Two of the topics will be covered as discussion items at today's meeting. The first is a statement that has been prepared to summarize work the Commission did in 2022 regarding the use of victim DNA. The second item relates to the identification and reporting of emerging drugs in Illinois. The third topic the subcommittee has discussed is the issue of funding for identification of unidentified human remains. Dr. Hughes expounded that she and Dr. Arunkumar have been meeting with representatives of stakeholder groups including the Illinois Coroners and Medical Examiners Association, the Cook County Sheriff's Office, and the ISP Division of Criminal Investigation to understand the fiscal support limitations for coroners and medical examiners dealing with unidentified human remains (UHR) investigations that are non-criminal in nature because such cases are outside the mandate of ISP's forensic science labs. They have created a summary of hurdles and thoughts on how the hurdles could be addressed in Illinois. Stakeholders are currently examining those ideas and will circle back for further discussion on possible legislative initiatives related to this issue.
4. Technology Subcommittee: Jeff Buford, subcommittee chairperson, reported that the subcommittee met twice since the last Commission meeting to discuss the topic of AI in forensic applications. The subcommittee has subject matter experts from all forensic disciplines participating in meetings and discussions. In April experts from NIST Dr. Henry Swofford and Melissa Taylor provided a presentation about applications and processes for AI in forensic science. The subcommittee met again after the NIST presentation to discuss key takeaways. The subcommittee focused on 5 areas: evidence analysis and interpretation, case management, communications, research and training, and quality

assurance. The subcommittee hopes to invite the subject matter experts from NIST back for a future meeting to discuss AI applications to specific forensic disciplines. Administrative processes seems like the most likely area where AI applications may be available for application in the near future. Mr. Buford also shared that the ISP toxicology section has moved forward to purchase technology that was discussed during the subcommittee's discussion during Phase II (emerging technology). DD Woolery indicated she would be interested to hear from NIST if they are aware of any laboratories that are using AI technology specifically applied to a forensic discipline, versus for research or administrative tasks. ED Watroba indicated that she will speak with them at the NIST symposium to see if they are available to join the subcommittee again in the future, given the current federal limitations.

5. Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy (FIGG) Subcommittee: Subcommittee chairperson Cris Hughes reported that the subcommittee continues to invite guest speakers to share information about different aspects of FIGG. At the last subcommittee meeting, Wendy McLean from the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification spoke about the genealogy aspect of the FIGG process, including the different types of genealogists and the types of experience and education they have. At its next meeting, the subcommittee will transition from hearing from subject matter experts to discussion on takeaways from the presenters and next steps for the subcommittee.

ED Watroba reminded Commission Members that they are free to join subcommittee meetings if they are interested in a particular topic or to change/add to their subcommittee membership.

Chairperson Kelly, who joined the meeting via Web Ex, shared that ISP has finalized its AI policy and use parameters. They have some restrictions on how AI can be used by anyone at ISP. A main component of the policy is ensuring that there is a human check and balance on everything that is done with AI. Dr. Hughes asked if the policy is publicly available. Chairperson Kelly indicated that the policy is available. ED Watroba and DD Woolery will connect with Dr. Hughes to forward that policy.

VI. Issues for Discussion

1. Discussion and possible action on Quality Systems Subcommittee Annual Report on Significant Non-Conformities for 2024:

Ms. Dragovich opened the floor for any questions or comments from Commission Members regarding the draft report that the subcommittee prepared. No Commission Members raised questions or comments. Ms. Dragovich reiterated that anyone from the Commission is free to join subcommittee meetings. ED Watroba noted that historically the primary task of the Quality Systems Subcommittee has been to compile the annual non-conformity report. The next meeting will be the first time that the

subcommittee has worked on another project, specifically reviewing the investigative report as discussed previously.

ED Watroba opened the floor to public comment from participants present both in-person and on-line prior to the vote. No public comment was offered.

A motion was made to approve the annual report to the Forensic Science Commission on significant non-conformities for 2024. The motion passed following a roll call vote (12 yes votes, 0 no votes/abstentions, 1 Member absent). ED Watroba indicated that the report will be posted on the Commission's website within a week or two.

2. Discussion and possible action on Fundamentals of Forensic Science Training Videos (Drug Chemistry and Latent Prints):

ED Watroba indicated that this item was included on the agenda to ensure compliance with the Open Meetings Act because there was a time when the subcommittee hoped to have the pilot videos ready for review and approval at this meeting. As previously discussed, however, the introductory video is still in production.

Judge Hill commented that these videos were a huge undertaking for the individuals who worked on them in addition to their regular work responsibilities and that he is impressed with the videos they created.

3. Discussion and possible action on Pubic Policy Subcommittee Recommended Statement regarding the use of victim DNA in unrelated criminal investigations:

ED Watroba provided background information on this agenda item. She indicated that the proposed statement was not substantively new. The impetus for creating the statement was an inquiry from someone in the DNA community as to where they could find documentation of the work the Commission did related to the use of victim DNA in 2022. Because this work was done in the early days of the Commission before the website was fully developed, the information available to the public was contained in meeting minutes. The subcommittee felt that a formalized document memorializing the work the Commission did related to the topic would be a beneficial resource. The historical resource document summarizes the work the Commission did and includes the legislation that subsequently passed. The letters sent to legislators are appended to the statement.

Ms. Ward commented that she very much appreciates the work done on this document. It solidifies the Commission's 2022 work and position on the issue and validates the legislation that eventually passed. The document also shows the Commission's continued commitment to the position that a victim's DNA which was collected for the purpose of investigating a crime reported by a

victim should not and cannot be used to investigate other crimes. ED Watroba commented that back in 2022 the Commission made sure that there were no Illinois laboratories engaged in the practice of using victim DNA to investigate other crimes, but the Commission also wanted to ensure that no labs used victim DNA in such a way in the future, which is why the Commission urged legislation on the topic.

ED Watroba opened the floor to public comment from participants present both in-person and on-line prior to the vote. No public comment was offered.

A motion was made to approve the Statement regarding the use of victim DNA in unrelated criminal investigations. The motion passed following a roll call vote (12 yes votes, 0 no votes/abstentions, 1 Member absent). ED Watroba indicated that the report will be posted on the Commission's website.

4. Discussion and possible action on Public Policy Subcommittee Recommendations related to the reporting of emerging drugs in Illinois:

Ms. Baker provided an overview of this topic, explaining that the subcommittee continues to discuss what happens when a lab identifies an emerging drug in seized drug case work and must evaluate that compound to determine if it is a controlled substance by chemical class under the Illinois Controlled Substances Act. Currently, each lab performs their own assessment. Although informal discussions may occur between lab systems when a novel compound is encountered, there is no formal mechanism in place for uniform classification of a novel drug. The subcommittee heard from forensic scientist technical leader Jennifer Watson from the Miami Valley Regional Crime Laboratory in Ohio who provided an overview of how the state of Ohio created an Emerging Drug Scientific Working Group in part as a response to Ohio's pharmacophore model of controlling compounds which requires an assessment as to whether a compound fits the model. The EDSWG invites participation from all public forensic chemistry and toxicology labs.

The Public Policy Subcommittee recognizes the possible benefits of a similar formalized group within Illinois. The primary benefit is uniform reporting amongst all laboratories. Representatives from ISP, NIRCL, and DuPage County Forensic Science Center have indicated they are in favor of a formalized process. The subcommittee continues to discuss possible mechanisms for creating a group similar to Ohio's EDSWG and options for where to house the group.

DD Woolery asked whether the subcommittee is thinking of creating a separate subcommittee to address this topic or keeping it under the umbrella of the Public Policy Subcommittee. Ms. Baker responded that the subcommittee has discussed the topic and noted that ED Watroba raised concerns about whether housing a group within the Commission would be consistent with the statutory charge and scope of the Commission. ED Watroba noted that there appears to be consensus that forming a group is

well-advised. Because Illinois has fewer lab systems performing seized drug analysis than Ohio, Illinois may not require the same level of formalization as Ohio's EDSWG to achieve the intended result in the short and long term. The subcommittee discussed bringing the issue before the Commission to see if there is consensus for the lab systems to begin the process of formally communicating when they observe a novel compound, similar to the recommendation put forth by the Technology Subcommittee regarding lab communication about LIMS. The next step would be to discuss where to house a formalized permanent group. ED Watroba raised several concerns about the appropriateness of housing the group within the Commission under the Commission's statutory scope. She noted that the group would discuss information from active cases and that an open meeting may not be the appropriate venue for such discussions. She also voiced a concern that housing the group within the Commission could cause confusion in the legal community, specifically by creating a perception that an agreement within the group that a novel compound is controlled by class constitutes a determination by the Commission that the compound is controlled.

Dr. Arunkumar suggested that the group have a mechanism to communicate with the hospital community and coroners and medical examiners in Illinois. She observed that information about new compounds observed by labs testing seized drugs could inform decisions regarding toxicological panels that are run by these entities by providing them with information regarding new drugs that are being abused. ED Watroba noted that this type of two-way communication between crime labs and public health entities and law enforcement was discussed by the subcommittee as another possible benefit to starting an emerging drugs working group.

Judge Hill inquired whether the subcommittee is asking the Commission to take any particular action today or whether the topic was being presented to the Commission for general discussion. ED Watroba indicated that the subcommittee left the issue open. The subcommittee discussed that a first step might be asking the Commission to recommend that the lab systems testing seized drugs work together to create a working group on the topic of reporting emerging drugs, similar to the LIMS working group recommendation that came from the Technology Subcommittee. Participation in the working group would be voluntary. In the meantime, the subcommittee can continue discussions on where and how to formalize and house the working group.

Ms. Tucker noted that a benefit to having the working group associated with the Commission is that medical examiners/coroners have representation on the Commission via Dr. Arunkumar. Judge Hill indicated support for creating a working group of the lab systems and for broader engagement with groups such as medical examiners/coroners and hospitals for information sharing. Judge Hill suggested that the labs getting together to start to brainstorm the process may be a good starting point. Judge Hill shared ED Watroba's concerns regarding having working group meetings under the umbrella of the Commission and therefore subject to the Open Meetings Act. ED Watroba

clarified that her observation regarding the Open Meetings Act should not be construed as an attempt to subvert the Open Meetings Act, but rather that the type of meeting topic discussions being contemplated does not seem to be a good fit for public meetings under the Act or the Commission's scope. ED Watroba opined that a recommendation from the Commission and/or guiding the process of creating the working group is consistent with the Commission's scope.

Ms. Hoos shared the legal concerns previously raised related to sharing case information in an open meeting setting. Ms. Hoos supports having the labs that participate in the group determine best practice for their work and that the group have a line of communication with other entities that would benefit from their observations regarding emerging drugs. Ms. Hoos suggested that a pilot project could be a path forward. Mr. Buford explained how the Technology Subcommittee developed its recommendation that lab systems communicate on their own on the topic of LIMS via a working group and recommended a similar model as a starting point that provides flexibility to grow. DD Woolery suggested that once the smaller working group is established and formalized then they could expand to include other stakeholder groups. She observed that all lab systems have locations in the northern part of the state.

Ms. Hoos suggested that the subcommittee or Commission formulate a description of what they are asking of the Commission today. Ms. Baker proposed asking the Commission to recommend the formation of a working group to address the identification and reporting of emerging drugs with a representative from each laboratory system. The group could then start discussing their purposes and objective and possible mechanisms for further formalization going forward.

ED Watroba opened the floor to public comment from participants present both in-person and on-line prior to the consensus vote. Timothy Ruppel offered public comment and requested that the Kane County Forensic Laboratory to be included in the working group. Mr. Ruppel indicated that Kane County is testing drugs in the northern part of Illinois. Additional discussion ensued about whether the issue would need to go back to the subcommittee for discussion in light of Mr. Ruppel's comment. Mr. Ruppel then changed his request and suggested that Kane County could join the group at a later date. ED Watroba inquired as to whether Kane County had been accredited to ISO 17025 for the analysis of seized drugs and Mr. Ruppel indicated that they are still working through the accreditation process.

The issue before the Commission for consensus vote was then revised to a request for the Commission to recommend that ISO 17025 accredited labs in Illinois for seized drugs form a working group on the topic of uniform reporting of emerging drugs. The motion was passed unanimously by consensus vote (one Member absent).

VII. Housekeeping Items

DD Woolery reminded Commission Members that the next Commission meeting is on Wednesday, September 10th at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign.

VIII. Public Comment

No public comment was offered.

IX. Meeting Schedule

The next meeting is scheduled at 10:00 a.m., on Wednesday, September 10, 2025, at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign Carl R. Woese Institute for Genomic Biology.

X. Adjournment

Director Designee Woolery and ED Watroba adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:37 a.m. on June 11, 2025.