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San Mateo County Forensic Laboratory

Issue

Has the Sheriff corrected the shortcomings at the San Mateo County Forensic Laboratory that were identified by previous grand juries?

Background

The 2000-01 Grand Jury found that the facilities then used by the laboratory were grossly inadequate and did not meet the criteria for a modern crime laboratory. The 2002-03 Grand Jury report titled "Handling Forensic Evidence" recommended sixty-seven changes or improvements that were later echoed by the 2004-05 Grand Jury.

Findings

With the construction, occupation, and use of a new and well-equipped facility, the 2001-02 Grand Jury's recommendations have been resolved.

The Sheriff, who bears responsibility for the laboratory, agreed to implement most of the recommendations of the 2002-03 and 2004-05 Grand Juries.

A representative sample of the Forensic Laboratory Executive Steering Committee¹ and the law enforcement agencies which use the laboratory are pleased with the improvements made by the laboratory management and staff and are satisfied with the services provided.

A knowledgeable outside expert stated that the laboratory was "on the right course" and "that the staff, from top to bottom, had bought into the new program."

¹ This committee establishes policies, sets the fee structure, and manages relations between the laboratory and other agencies. It is currently composed of three police chiefs, the District Attorney and Deputy District Attorney, the Sheriff and Undersheriff, and one city manager.

Finally, the laboratory has worked diligently and successfully to attain full accreditation with the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors/Laboratory Accreditation Board (ASCLD/LAB). The society is a nonprofit professional society devoted to the improvement of crime laboratory operations by fostering the highest standards of practice in the field of crime laboratory services.

Conclusion

The Sheriff and laboratory staff are commended for their efforts in addressing the prior Grand Juries' recommendations and achieving full accreditation with the ASCLD/LAB.