

Illinois Forensic Science Commission- Public Policy Subcommittee

Meeting Minutes

January 24, 2025, 2:00 p.m. meeting

I. Call to order

Claire Dragovich, called the meeting to order at approximately 2 p.m. The meeting was held via Web Ex.

II. Roll-call

The following people were present:

1. Dr. Ponni Arunkumar, FS Commission member, subcommittee member
2. Jillian Baker, FS Commission Member, subcommittee member
3. Claire Dragovich, FS Commission Member, subcommittee member
4. Cris Hughes, FS Commission Member, subcommittee member
5. Amy Watroba, Executive Director-Forensic Science Commission
6. Timothy Ruppel
7. Sarah Ware

III. Review/Adoption of the Minutes

1. The Meeting Minutes of 11/25/24 were adopted by unanimous vote.

IV. Discussion: Ideas and topics for subcommittee to consider addressing in 2025

Subcommittee members present all agreed to move forward with addressing new issues not related to the DUI-Cannabis statute. The following ideas were discussed:

1. Dr. Hughes suggested that the subcommittee examine issues related to the Illinois Missing Persons Act and possible funding sources for medical examiners and coroners to obtain the forensic testing services needed to attempt to identify unidentified human remains (UHR). Dr. Hughes provided background information on testing resources that were previously available and changes that have occurred in the availability of those services. Dr. Arunkumar also provided information about the number of UHRs in Cook County, the types of resources available, and the timeframe and costs for those resources (i.e. sending bone samples to ISP for DNA testing, RTI, NamUs). Dr. Hughes noted that most available funding is from short-term federal grants

and thus there is no sustainable funding source for coroners and medical examiners to utilize for forensic testing. Ms. Dragovich noted the upcoming changes to FBI's QAS in July of 2025 which will allow for the use of modified Rapid DNA on some crime scene samples with instruments that are located at partnering agencies, but that these will have to be used under the scope of a lab's ISO 17025 accreditation and will require much from the lab partnering with the outside agency. The question of whether medical examiner or coroner offices (versus just law enforcement agencies) would be eligible to test samples using modified Rapid in partnership with an accredited lab under the new QAS is worth exploring. Dr. Hughes indicated that she was meeting with the Board of Directors of the Illinois Coroners & Medical Examiners Association (ICMEA) the following week to discuss possible collaborations and next steps to address issues facing coroners and medical examiners. Dr. Arunkumar shared that her office is working with the state to scan fingerprints and check those against FBI databases to assist with identifying remains in the first instance and confirming human identifications of remains, but that they need a long-term solution for their DNA testing needs. Dr. Hughes suggested the lack of centralized tracking of UHRs and missing persons in Illinois is an issue that might be addressed by the Commission. The other overarching issues are the lack of support for needed forensic services and the lack of available funding for those services. The subcommittee discussed the different folders and levels of CODIS and identified the topic as one that could be a topic for an invited guest to address to better understand testing and CODIS uploading options for UHRs.

2. The topic of the forthcoming changes to FBI's QAS, specifically related to the use of modified Rapid technology on forensic samples, was identified as a possible topic for independent discussion about the possible impact on lab. The topic may also dovetail with the issues discussed related to testing options available to coroners and medical examiners.
3. Ms. Baker suggested that the subcommittee consider the issue of drug classifications under the Illinois Controlled Substance Act, specifically the option of creating a formal mechanism or board that could review novel substances identified at labs to consider whether the compounds fit into the statutory classes of substances. Ms. Baker and Ms. Dragovich explained that labs report out a compound identified at the lab but that the end users want to know if that compound is controlled. At present there are informal discussions between labs regarding novel substances and whether they are controlled under the statute, but there is no formal mechanism in place to ensure that labs are consistently identifying the same novel compound as either controlled or not controlled. They indicated that other states have mechanisms where

labs collectively decide the issue of whether a particular novel compound is controlled, including Ohio. Since the drug market is constantly evolving, this process also could help labs collectively identify trends of new compounds they identify at the labs and when recommendations for additions or amendments to the Illinois Controlled Substances Act might be warranted. The Commission could then make legislative recommendations. Ms. Watroba raised the issue of how a centralized location or body for these determinations might work structurally and legally inside or outside of the Commission. It was suggested that the subcommittee look at the practices in other states to see if their systems are set up by statute, administrative code, etc. and how their controlled substances laws differ. Ms. Baker will get information about Ohio. The lab director from SLU might also be a resource since that lab tracks trends in drug usage, albeit from more of a public health perspective.

The subcommittee decided to continue discussing possible new issues to address at the next meeting so that subcommittee members who were absent from this meeting could weigh in.

V. Old Business
None.

VI. New Business
None.

VII. Public Comment
No public comment.

VIII. Meeting Schedule
The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for Friday, February 28, 2025. Ms. Watroba will create a Doodle Poll with possible meeting times.

IX. Adjournment
Ms. Dragovich adjourned the meeting at approximately 3:14 p.m.