



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF FORENSIC SCIENCE

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
A Nationally Accredited Laboratory

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NOTICE REGARDING CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES WORKLOAD

To: All Agencies Served by DFS

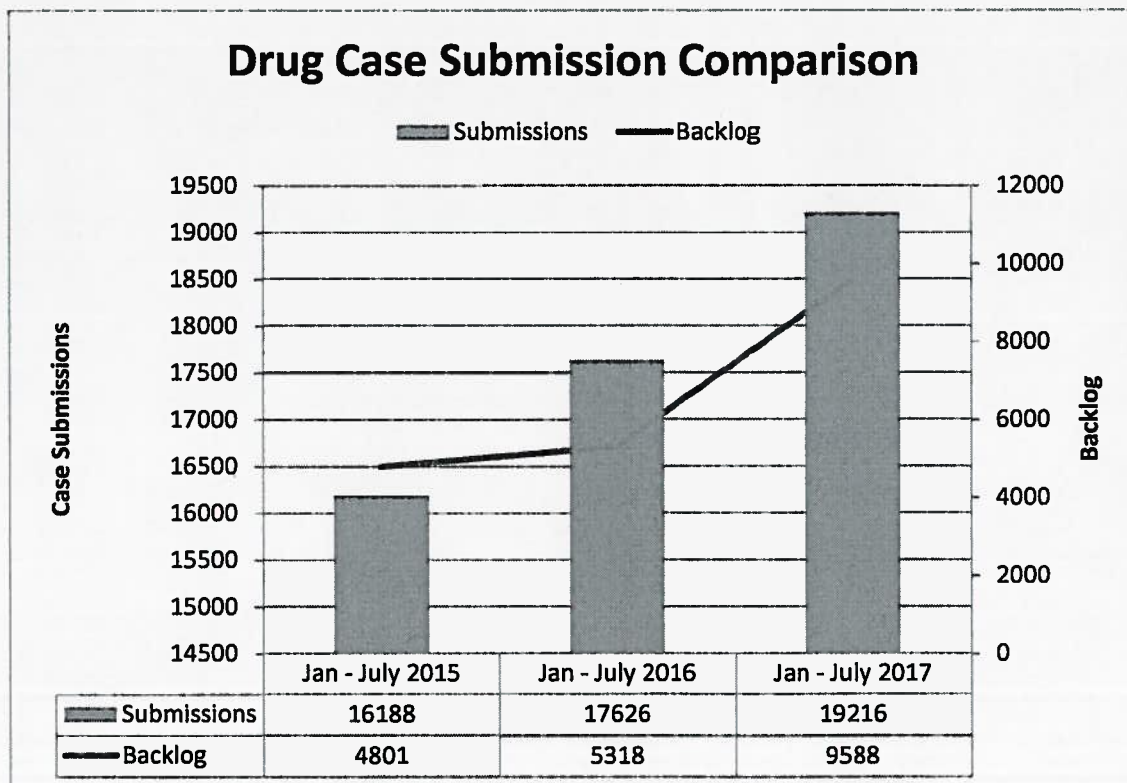
From: Linda Jackson, Department Director 

Date: August 16, 2017

RE: Controlled Substances Submissions

In recent weeks, the Department of Forensic Science (DFS) has received numerous communications from its user agencies expressing concerns about delays in the analysis of controlled substances cases. Multiple factors have contributed to the growing backlog in our Controlled Substances Section.

The Controlled Substances Section has seen a continuing increase in submissions. This increase is illustrated in the graph below, which compares a seven-month period, January - July, for years 2015, 2016, and 2017.



As the graph above reflects, there has been an overall increase in submissions of 19% over two years. During the same two-year period, the statewide backlog grew by nearly 89% from 4,801 cases at the end of July 2015 to 9,588 cases at the end of July 2017. The average controlled substances case turnaround time was 99 days at the end of July 2017.

Another complicating factor is the growing complexity of cases analyzed. Synthetic opioids, cannabimimetic agents and research chemicals require additional time to process and identify. As these substances are continually evolving, additional reference standards must be obtained, and analytical procedures must be developed and/or verified to identify these compounds.

Additional safety precautions have been implemented in response to the increasing lethality of the substances our examiners must analyze. These measures, which include expanded environmental controls and additional personal protective equipment, likewise add time to the analytical process, but are essential for examiner safety when handling unknown, potentially lethal substances.

Although the Controlled Substances Sections in the Central and Eastern Laboratories are fully staffed, the Northern and Western Laboratories have a combined total of eight scientist positions either in training or in the hiring process. Cases from the Northern and Western Laboratories are being transferred to Central and Eastern in order to better align the backlogs among the regional laboratories.

We recognize the impact that increased turnaround times have on the criminal justice process and are working to address the issue. Three new Controlled Substances forensic scientist positions were created for FY18; however, it takes new scientists between nine and 12 months to be trained and qualified as DFS scientists. We will continue to assess the volume of submissions and our capacity to more timely perform the requested analyses.

For general questions about Controlled Substances case turnaround times or resources, please contact Chemistry Program Manager Scott Maye at (804) 588-4168. For case specific questions, please contact the Controlled Substances Section Supervisor at the DFS Laboratory that provides service to your agency:

Central (Richmond) – John Przybylski (804) 588-4154

Eastern (Norfolk) – Brian Meinweiser (757) 355-5958

Northern (Manassas) – Jeana Rodenas (703) 334-9736

Western (Roanoke) – Chris Bryant (540) 283-5927