

April 24, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chairman
House Committee on Judiciary
State House, House Lounge
Providence, RI 02903

Re: HB 6229 – Establishment of the State Crime Laboratory Commission

Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I write today to express my support for HB 6229 legislation that proposes the establishment of a unified Rhode Island State Crime Laboratory. This important bill would facilitate the consolidation and modernization of the Rhode Island State Crime Lab and the broader forensic science system in the state.

With over three decades of experience in forensic science, including 13 years as Director of the Connecticut State Crime Lab and prior service as Director of the Massachusetts State Forensic Laboratory, I have firsthand knowledge of the challenges and opportunities that come with overseeing state crime laboratories. From my perspective, the consolidation outlined in HB 6229 is both a necessary and strategic move that aligns with national best practices. It commits to improve operational efficiency, elevate service quality, and most importantly, enhance public trust in forensic science.

A unified crime laboratory structure would be better positioned to access and leverage federal funding, make data-driven budgetary decisions, and prioritize technological advancements. Critically, it would also support the appointment of a dedicated, full-time quality assurance manager to oversee the entirety of forensic operations, a role essential to maintaining accreditation, ensuring procedural integrity, and supporting the professional development of lab personnel.

At present, the Rhode Island State Crime Lab is not of sufficient size to justify a full-time quality assurance manager. Currently the responsibilities related to quality assurance are fragmented due to competing priorities of an employee also tasked with performing forensic analysis and supervision. Consolidation would allow for more focused oversight, ensuring consistent compliance with protocols and accreditation standards throughout the forensic science system.

In Connecticut, our state crime laboratory is a division that operates within the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, under the leadership of a commissioner. The six-division department includes the Connecticut State Police and Homeland Security. As Director, I am appointed by the commissioner and entrusted with the independent management of the lab. It is essential to structure a laboratory that provides scientific objectivity and transparency to criminal justice stakeholders including the defense bar. The Connecticut structure has never impeded our effectiveness or objectivity. Instead, it fosters a collaborative environment with law enforcement and other stakeholders, while maintaining the scientific integrity and impartiality essential to our work.

Connecticut does not operate under a commission or oversight body, and I do not think a commission is necessary to sustain a high quality and unbiased forensic laboratory. Our credibility is sustained through rigorous national accreditation, courtroom scrutiny, external audits and continuous quality oversight through a manager dedicated to overseeing quality assurance. This model is widely used in other states and among federal agencies such as the ATF, DEA, and FBI.

With over 30 years of experience and having led two state laboratories, I firmly believe in empowering qualified professionals to lead and manage forensic science operations. HB 6229 takes a critical step toward that goal for Rhode Island.

I encourage the General Assembly to give this legislation serious consideration. Should any member of the Committee wish to observe a similar model in action, I would gladly welcome you to the Connecticut State Crime Laboratory.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

/s/ Guy Vallaro

Guy Vallaro, Ph.D.