



Support for Forensic Science Research: Improving the Scientific Role of the National Institute of Justice

Committee on Strengthening Forensic Science at the National Institute of Justice, Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Engineering, and Medicine National Academies of Sciences

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Reliable and valid forensic science analytic techniques are critical to a credible, fair, and evidence-based criminal justice system. There is widespread agreement that the scientific foundation of some currently available forensic science methods needs strengthening and that additional, more efficient techniques are urgently needed. These needs can only be met through sustained research programs explicitly designed to ensure and improve the reliability and validity of current methods and to foster the development and use of new and better techniques. This task is challenging due to the broad nature of the field.

Concerns have been raised repeatedly about the ability of the criminal justice system to collect and analyze evidence efficiently and to be fair in its verdicts. Although significant progress has been made in some forensic science disciplines, the forensic science community still faces many challenges. Federal leadership, particularly in regard to research and the scientific validation of forensic science methods, is needed to help meet the pressing issues facing state and local jurisdictions.

This report reviews the progress made by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) to advance forensic science research since the 2009 report, *Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward* and the 2010 report, *Strengthening the National Institute of Justice. Support for Forensic Science Research* examines the ways in which NIJ develops its forensic science research priorities and communicates those priorities as well as its findings to the scientific and forensic practitioner communities in order to determine the impact of NIJ forensic science research programs and how that impact can be enhanced.

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