Texas Forensic Science Commission

FINAL REPORT ON SELF DISCLOSURE NO. 25.01; CASSANDRA CAVAZOS (HCIFS; SEIZED DRUGS)

April 11, 2025

Table of Contents

TABLE OF EXHIBITS

I. BACKGROUND

A. History and Mission of the Texas Forensic Science Commission

The Texas Forensic Science Commission (Commission) was created during the 79th Legislative Session in 2005 with the passage of HB-1068. The Act amended the Code of Criminal Procedure to add Article 38.01, which describes the composition and authority of the Commission. During subsequent legislative sessions, the Texas Legislature further amended the Code of Criminal Procedure to clarify and expand the Commission's jurisdictional responsibilities and authority.[1]

The Commission has nine members appointed by the Governor of Texas.[2] Seven of the nine commissioners are scientists or medical doctors and two are attorneys (one prosecutor nominated by the Texas District and County Attorney's Association and one criminal defense attorney nominated by the Texas Criminal Defense Lawyer's Association).[3] The Commission's Presiding Officer is Jeffrey Barnard, MD.

B. Commission Jurisdiction

1. Investigations of Professional Negligence and Professional Misconduct Resulting from Laboratory Self-Disclosures

Texas law requires the Commission to "investigate in a timely manner, any allegation of professional negligence or professional misconduct that would substantially affect the integrity of the results of a forensic analysis conducted by a crime laboratory."[4] The term "forensic analysis" is defined as a medical, chemical, toxicological, ballistic, or other examination or test performed

[1] *See e.g.*, Acts 2013, 83rd Leg. ch. 782 (S.B. 1238) §§ 1-4 (2013); Acts 2015, 84th Leg. ch. 1276 (S.B. 1287) §§ 1-7 (2015), Acts 2023, 88th Leg. ch. 742 (H.B. 3506) §§ 1-2 (2023), Acts 2023, 88th Leg. ch. 1149 (S.B. 0991) § 1 (2023).
[2] TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.01 § 3.
[3] *Id.*
[4] TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.01 § 4(a)(3)(A).

on physical evidence, including DNA evidence, for the purpose of determining the connection of the evidence to a criminal action.[5]

Crime laboratories must self-report professional negligence or professional misconduct to the Commission.[6] The statute does not define the terms "professional negligence" and "professional misconduct." The Commission defined those terms in its administrative rules.[7]

> "Professional misconduct" means the forensic analyst or crime laboratory, through a material act or omission, deliberately failed to follow the standard of practice that an ordinary forensic analyst or crime laboratory would have followed, and the deliberate act or omission would substantially affect the integrity of the results of a forensic analysis. An act or omission was deliberate if the forensic analyst or crime laboratory was aware of and consciously disregarded an accepted standard of practice required for a forensic analysis.
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> "Professional negligence" means the forensic analyst or crime laboratory, through a material act or omission, negligently failed to follow the standard of practice that an ordinary forensic analyst or crime laboratory would have followed, and the negligent act or omission would substantially affect the integrity of the results of a forensic analysis. An act or omission was negligent if the forensic analyst or crime laboratory should have been but was not aware of an accepted standard of practice.

2. Accreditation Jurisdiction

The Commission is charged with accrediting crime laboratories and other entities that conduct forensic analyses of physical evidence.[8] The term "crime laboratory" includes a public or private laboratory or other entity that conducts a forensic analysis subject to article 38.35 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.[9]

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[5] TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.35(a)(4).
[6] *Id.* at art. 38.01 § 4(a)(1)-(2) (2019); *See also*, 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.219(c)(5) (2020).
(Pursuant to the Forensic Analyst Licensing Program Code of Professional Responsibility, members of crime laboratory management shall make timely and full disclosure to the Texas Forensic Science Commission of any non-conformance that may rise to the level of professional negligence or professional misconduct).
[7] 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.302 (7), (8), and (10) (2020). The term "would substantially affect the integrity of the results of a forensic analysis" does not necessarily require that a criminal case be impacted or a report be issued to a customer in error. The term includes acts or omissions that would call into question the integrity of the forensic analysis, the forensic analyst or analysts, or the crime laboratory as a whole regardless of the ultimate outcome in the underlying criminal case.
[8] TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.01 § 4-d(b).
[9] *Id.* at art. 38.35(a)(1).

3. Licensing Jurisdiction

Under Texas law, a person may not act or offer to act as a forensic analyst unless the person holds a forensic analyst license issued by the Commission.[10] While accreditation is granted to entities that perform forensic analysis, licensing is a credential obtained by individuals who practice forensic analysis. The Texas forensic licensing program took effect on January 1, 2019.

The law defines the term "forensic analyst" as "a person who on behalf of a crime laboratory [accredited by the Commission] technically reviews or performs a forensic analysis or draws conclusions from or interprets a forensic analysis for a court or crime laboratory."[11]

Pursuant to its licensing authority, the Commission may take disciplinary action against a license holder or applicant for a license on a determination by the Commission that a license holder or applicant for a license committed professional misconduct or violated Texas Code of Criminal Procedure Article 38.01 or an administrative rule or other order by the Commission.[12] If the Commission determines a license holder committed professional misconduct or violated an administrative rule or order by the Commission, the Commission may: (1) revoke or suspend the person's license; (2) refuse to renew the person's license; (3) reprimand the license holder; or (4) deny the person a license.[13] The Commission may place on probation a person whose license is suspended.[14] Disciplinary proceedings and the process for appealing a disciplinary action by the Commission are governed by the Judicial Branch Certification Commission.[15]

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[10] *Id.* at art. 38.01 § 4-a(b); 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.201(c) (2018).
[11] *Id.* at art. 38.01 § 4-a(a)(2).
[12] *Id.* at art. 38.01 § 4-c; 37 Tex. Admin Code § 651.216(a) (2024).
[13] 37 Tex. Admin Code § 651.216(a)(1)-(4) (2024).
[14] *Id.* at (b).
[15] TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.01 § 4-c(e); 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.216(d) (2024).

4. Jurisdiction Applicable to the Disclosure

The disclosing crime laboratory, the Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS), is accredited by the Commission and the ANSI National Accreditation Board (ANAB) under International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard 17025: 2017, and falls within the Commission's jurisdiction.[16] The individual who is the subject of the disclosure, Cassandra Cavazos, was employed as a Toxicology Analyst at HCIFS at the time the disclosure was filed. She has been licensed by the Commission in both the Seized Drugs and Toxicology disciplines since the inception of the licensing program in January 2019. Her license was most recently renewed in 2024 and will expire on January 31, 2026. Her current license status is "inactive" because she is no longer employed by a Texas-accredited crime laboratory, a threshold requirement for licensure in either the Seized Drugs or the Toxicology discipline. The focus of this report is on the Seized Drugs category of licensure, specifically the proficiency testing requirement.

C. Investigative Process

The Commission's administrative rules set forth the process by which it determines whether to accept a self-disclosure for investigation as well as the process used to conduct the investigation.[17] The Commission's rules also describe the process for appealing final investigative reports by the Commission including possible disciplinary actions against a license holder or applicant.[18]

[16] *See*, https://fsc.txcourts.gov/AccreditedLabPublic# for a list of accredited laboratories.
[17] 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.304-307 (2019).
[18] 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.401 (2024).

D. Limitations of this Report

The Commission's authority contains important limitations. For example, no finding by the Commission constitutes a comment upon the guilt or innocence of any individual.[19] The Commission's written reports are not admissible in civil or criminal actions.[20] The Commission does not have the authority to subpoena documents or testimony; information received during any investigation is dependent on the willingness of affected parties to submit relevant documents and respond to questions posed. Information gathered in this report was not subjected to standards for the admission of evidence in a courtroom. For example, no individual testified under oath, was limited by either the Texas or Federal Rules of Evidence (*e.g.*, against the admission of hearsay) or was subject to cross-examination under a judge's supervision.

II. SUMMARY OF THE SELF-DISCLOSURE

The disclosure submitted by HCIFS alleges that Toxicology Analyst Cassandra Cavazos, who originally worked in the Seized Drugs section of the laboratory but subsequently transitioned to the Toxicology section, altered a Proficiency Testing Certification Form that had been completed and signed by the HCIFS Senior Director of Quality before the analyst submitted this incorrect form to the Commission with her license renewal application in November 2024. After investigation, HCIFS management concluded the analyst knowingly altered the form to give the false impression that she had been proficiency tested in the discipline of Seized Drugs when she had not. (*See*, **Exhibit A**: **HCIFS Disclosure and Timeline**).

[19] TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.01 § 4(g).
[20] *Id*. at § 11.

A. Notice and Investigative Decision

On, January 8, 2025, staff contacted the analyst requesting a response to the allegations in the self-disclosure. She responded in writing on January 26, 2025. (*See,* **Exhibit B: Analyst Response**) At its January 31, 2025, quarterly meeting, the Commission voted to accept the disclosure for investigation by staff.[21]

B. Staff Investigation

Staff reviewed the documents provided by HCIFS and the response submitted by the analyst, as well as the Commission's historical records regarding the licensing and proficiency monitoring certificates submitted by the analyst between 2018 and 2024.

On March 6, 2025, staff interviewed the analyst, Cassandra Cavazos. On April 1, 2025, staff interviewed Dr. Teresa Gray, Director of Forensic Toxicology, and Michal Pierce, Senior Director of Quality Management.

III. COMMISSION OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

A. Commission Licensing Program Rules Regarding Proficiency Monitoring

The Texas Administrative Code sets forth the rules related to the Commission's Forensic Analyst Licensing Program in Chapter 651, Subchapter C. In general, Rule 651.207(b) requires a Forensic Analyst to renew their license every two years. An applicant for a license renewal is required to complete and submit to the Commission a current Forensic Analyst License Renewal Application provided by the Commission.[22]

An applicant for a Forensic Analyst License renewal employed by an accredited laboratory is required to provide an updated copy of the Commission's Proficiency Monitoring Certification form demonstrating the applicant participates in the laboratory's process for intra-laboratory

[21] *See*, 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.307(d) (2024).
[22] 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.208(d) (2024).

comparison, inter-laboratory comparison, proficiency testing, or observation-based performance monitoring requirements in compliance with and on the timeline set forth by the laboratory's accrediting body's requirements.[23] The form must be signed by the laboratory's authorized representative (typically a representative from the laboratory's quality division), and designate the specific forensic discipline in which each Forensic Analyst actively performs forensic casework or is currently authorized or participating in a training program to become authorized to perform supervised or independent forensic casework.[24] After the form is completed by management, it is provided to employees so they may upload it to the Top Class application system with their license applications. In this case, the 2024 PT Form was signed by the laboratory's Senior Director of Quality on October 17, 2024. The PT Form was subsequently distributed to the multiple analysts whose proficiency testing compliance was included. The completed PDF document was not locked down and was editable by the form's recipients.

B. Cavazos' Laboratory Work and Licensing History

Cavazos started working at HCIFS in the Seized Drugs Section of the laboratory in 2014. Between 2017 and 2019, Cavazos and a few other analysts from Seized Drugs were cross-trained and assisted in the Toxicology section of the laboratory. Cavazos applied for a transfer to the Forensic Toxicology section in 2019, which was granted.

Cavazos initially applied to the Texas Forensic Science Commission licensing program in late 2018. She was among the first group of candidates to apply. At the time, she applied for and was granted licensure in both Seized Drugs and Toxicology. She was compliant with the proficiency testing requirements for both disciplines in 2018 and 2020 according to the Proficiency

[23] *Id*. at § 651.208(e) (2024).
[24] *Id*. at § 651.208(e)(1) and (2) (2024).

Testing Certification Forms submitted during those licensing cycles. She has been licensed by the Commission in both disciplines since that time.

1.2022 Renewal Application

In November 2022, Cavazos submitted a renewal application to be licensed in Toxicology only. However, shortly after submission (the same day), she emailed Commission staff stating: "I wanted to confirm if I had selected both seized drugs and toxicology (general, non-interpretive) for my license. If not, how do I update." Commission staff informed her she had only selected one discipline (Toxicology) on her renewal application and offered to "update discipline(s) if you wish." Cavazos confirmed that "Yes, I wish to update to both disciplines Seized Drugs Analyst and Toxicology Analyst (general, non-interpretive)." Staff updated her renewal application to include both disciplines. (*See*, **Exhibit C: Nov. 2022 email)**. However, there is no record that Commission staff requested a proficiency testing form for Seized Drugs at this time. The HCIFS Proficiency Testing Certification Form for 2022 listed the analyst as being as in compliance with the proficiency testing requirements in Toxicology only. Thus in 2022, the Commission should have denied Cavazos' request to continue including Seized Drugs as a discipline on her license.

C. Cavazos' 2024 Application and Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form

On November 24, 2024, Cavazos submitted a license renewal application seeking licensure both as a Seized Drug Analyst and as a Toxicology Analyst (General, Non-Interpretive). Uploaded as an attachment to the application was a TFSC Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form. The PT form submitted with her application listed her as compliant with the accrediting body's proficiency testing requirements for *both* Seized Drugs *and* Toxicology (General, Non-Interpretive) (*See*, **Exhibit D: Altered PT Form**). The form states that "[a]ll licensed analyst and technicians, whether voluntary or mandatory licensees, must participate in a proficiency

monitoring program that corresponds to the forensic analyst or forensic technician's specific discipline and job duties."

D. Issues with the 2024 Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form

On December 6, 2024, Cavazos had a meeting with Dr. Teresa Gray, the Director of Forensic Toxicology and Cavazos' supervisor. During this meeting, Cavazos asked Dr. Gray whether she should maintain her Seized Drugs license. Dr. Gray referred her to the Senior Director of Quality.

On December 9, 2024, Cavazos sent an email to the Senior Director of Quality stating she had been maintaining her Seized Drugs and Toxicology Licenses since 2018. She asked whether it was "OK" for her to maintain both as she had not been proficiency tested in Seized Drugs since 2019. The Senior Director of Quality responded via email that she should only have renewed under Toxicology as the required PT certification form did not include Seized Drugs. The Senior Director of Quality subsequently asked: "Just to be clear – you renewed recently, and they [TFSC] renewed you for both disciplines, despite the PT Form only saying Tox?"

Ten minutes later Cavazos responded "I did renew recently for both disciplines and got approved. However, I just checked the PT form I submitted. When I went through it the first time, I inadvertently messed with the drop-down box on mine and [a Seized Drugs Analyst's] disciplines. I must have saved it incorrectly and appeared to have submitted the wrong one which makes sense now why it got approved in the first place." She included a screen shot of the section of the form that contained her name and showed her as PT compliant in both disciplines. Cavazos continued: "This was not my intention as I know I have only had PT for Tox." The Senior Director of Quality asked her for the version of the PT form she submitted to the TFSC. Cavazos attached a copy of the incorrect form and stated:" This was the version I must've submitted which was incorrectly saved." (*See*, **Exhibit E Email**).

On the same day, the Senior Director of Quality confirmed that the PT form sent to Cavazos on October 17, 2024, correctly listed her as completing proficiency testing only in Toxicology. (*See,* **Exhibit F**: Correct PT Form).

E. Cavazos' Explanation of Altered PT Form to Laboratory Management

When asked how and why an altered version of the form was submitted for license renewal, Cavazos stated that she clicked on the dropdown menu belonging to the Seized Drugs Analyst listed directly below her on the PT Certification Form and thought she had changed it back before saving it as a new document. "When I received the signed form, I must have messed with [the other analyst's] dropdowns on the form. I meant to put it back the way it was for [the other analyst]. But then I must have clicked the wrong box, the one above hers, which was the one below mine. And I did not notice I had clicked on the Seized Drugs box under mine, instead of hers, since the boxes are so close together. And I saved the form on my desktop and then uploaded that for my license application." She maintained she did not realize she clicked on her own dropdown menu in addition to the other analyst's and the addition was inadvertent. During later discussions with laboratory management, Cavazos attributed the error to a "glitch in Adobe."

Using the native audit trail feature in Adobe, HCIFS management concluded that Cavazos did change the drop-down menu for her own disciplines on her saved copy of the PT Form after the Senior Director of Quality signed the certification. However, since the audit trail does not show a change when a drop-down menu is changed to a new value then changed back to the original value before resaving, it cannot be determined if Cavazos actually changed the dropdown for the other analyst.

F. Cavazos Explanation of the Altered PT Form to Commission Staff

When interviewed by Commission staff, Cavazos explained that when she was scrolling to find her name on the form, she accidentally clicked on the other analyst's name and since the form was editable, she inadvertently changed the other analyst's discipline to something else and was trying to correct it. According to Cavazos, her Adobe "had a kind of lapse, or whatever kind of glitch." She claimed she must have highlighted the section above hers accidentally. She also claimed she was "in a rush" and just saved it. She thought she saved it correctly and didn't realize it was wrong. Cavazos maintains she did not notice the error until it was brought to light during her discussions with the Senior Director of Quality.

When pressed further regarding the fact that simply scrolling over other analysts' names does not change anything in the form, she stated she must have accidentally clicked on the name when she was scrolling and somehow changed something. She claimed she was then just trying to change it back to what the other analyst originally listed as her discipline. She claimed the page display was off from where she was scrolling, and she must have accidently hit the field and changed the discipline due to the misalignment she described in Adobe.

When the field above the other analyst's name is clicked, it reads: "Please select discipline" and the user must scroll down a list of possible disciplines. Because the disciplines are listed alphabetically, Seized Drugs is toward the end of the list of options.

When she was asked about "saving" the changes, Cavazos stated she did not know the form was wrong and she thought it was back to the way it was originally sent to her by the Senior Director of Quality. She explained that the form hadn't been saved on her computer yet and it needed to be saved so she could upload it with her renewal application.

Cavazos was asked to explain the issue with Adobe she was experiencing, she indicated she had an older version of Microsoft Windows on her computer and that it had been months since any updates and her computer tended to "lag a lot." Cavazos explained that she had "glitches" in Adobe a lot of times it would "do weird things." She stated that sometimes Adobe would crash, and she would have to reopen the PDFs again. She also claimed that sometimes when applying electronic signatures, it would end up outside of the page rather than on the page itself. She also stated that she submitted a Help Desk ticket because the computer was running slow.

G. Alleged Confusion Over the PT Requirements

During her interview, Cavazos expressed uncertainty over the requirement to be proficiency tested in Seized Drugs to maintain a license in the Seized Drugs discipline. She claimed she didn't realize that she needed to be proficiency tested in both Seized Drugs and Toxicology, and that is why she applied for both disciplines in her 2024 renewal application. When the Senior Director of Quality informed Cavazos she should have only applied for Toxicology, she claims that "came as a surprise to her."

However, the documentary record contradicts Ms. Cavazos' assertion that the PT requirement was a surprise. At various points, Ms. Cavazos appears to have known that she had to be proficiency tested in Seized Drugs to maintain a Seized Drugs license. For example, in June 2019, the Senior Director of Quality emailed Cavazos to ask if she intended to maintain licensure in both Seized Drugs and Toxicology. Cavazos answered affirmatively stating she would like to maintain her license for Seized Drugs as well as keeping her ABC Fellow Certification for Drug Analysis. Cavazos listed the requirements of 8 hours of Toxicology training courses plus 8 hours of Seized Drugs training courses every two years and proficiency testing for both Toxicology and

Drug Chemistry every year, and asked "is this correct?". The Senior Director of Quality responded "Yes, that is currently correct." (*See*, **Exhibit G**: **6.2019 email)**

In August of 2019, Cavazos emailed the Senior Director of Quality and inquired: "I just wanted to see if I needed to be in this round of proficiency tests for Drug Chem in order to maintain my license for both Seized Drugs and Toxicology, as well as my ABC fellow certification." The Senior Director of Quality responded that "Technically you don't need to be in this round, because you have already participated in a PT round this year." (*See*, **Exhibit H**: **8.2019 email**)

In February 2020, Cavazos emailed the quality division asking: "I was wanting to see if I was going to be part of the Drug Chemistry proficiencies at some point this year. I was attempting to continue to be proficient for my TFSC license in Seized drugs and Toxicology as well as my status for my Fellow status for my ABC certification in Drug Analysis." The Quality Division indicated they were referring the query to a certain person in the laboratory and added "hopefully one of the tests on this round will be assigned to you." *(See*, **Exhibit I 2.2020 email)**.

Cavazos acknowledged these emails but stated "If I did know that in 2019, I don't remember." "I guess I forgot a few years later, because when I asked to have both titles again in 2022, I sent an email to the Texas Forensic Science Commission asking if I could. I wasn't reminded that proficiency testing was required for both disciplines." While it is true that Commission staff in 2022 erred in approving her request to add Seized Drugs to her application, her claims of confusion regarding the proficiency requirements in 2024 are not supported by the documentary record. First and foremost, she applied for licensure in both disciplines. Second, when she came to the realization that she really should not be licensed in Seized Drugs and reached out to the Senior Director of Quality asking how to correct the issue with the Commission, the Senior Director of Quality immediately expressed her disbelief that she was approved for licensure

in both due to lack of current proficiency. When the Senior Director of Quality asked her point blank what she submitted on the proficiency form, the analyst acknowledged having submitted the "wrong one which makes sense now why it [the Seized Drugs discipline] got approved in the first place." This indicates her understanding that PT was indeed required for each discipline, and only an error or oversight could have led to licensure in a discipline for which an analyst has not maintained documentation of proficiency.

H. Contemporaneous American Board of Forensic Toxicology Examination Laboratory Requirements

Around the same time as the 2024 renewal application and processing, Cavazos was studying for a challenging examination for certification by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology. In the Toxicology Section of HCIFS, it is a requirement that an analyst successfully complete this examination within three years. If an analyst does not pass this examination, they could be demoted to laboratory technician, transferred to another section, or released from employment. According to HCIFS management, Cavazos was concerned about passing the ABFT exam. During her interview, Cavazos acknowledged being worried about passing the exam, as it is perceived as difficult. She further acknowledged that she had thought about becoming a drug chemist again if she did not pass the exam.

I. Help Desk Ticket Resolved

Staff inquired of HCIFS whether Cavazos had reported issues with her computer hardware or Adobe software before the PT form was altered. The Information Technology (IT) department responded with all Help Desk tickets submitted by Cavazos and observed that Cavazos reported "some applications are running slow on my computer such as Adobe and Microsoft Excel." "My computer hasn't had any software/Windows updates since June." She requested that IT perform the latest updates.

The IT employee who serviced the request reported that the ticket was closed on September 30, 2024. He specifically noted that the computer "has Adobe P(r)o 9 that did not have any issues." He sent an email to Cavazos on that date asking to be notified if the computer still ran slowly. No further tickets were submitted, and the Proficiency Monitoring Form was not completed by the Senior Director of Quality until October 17, 2024.

J. Professional Misconduct Finding

> "Professional misconduct" means the forensic analyst or crime laboratory, through a material act or omission, deliberately failed to follow the standard of practice that an ordinary forensic analyst or crime laboratory would have followed, and the deliberate act or omission would substantially affect the integrity of the results of a forensic analysis. An act or omission was deliberate if the forensic analyst or crime laboratory was aware of and consciously disregarded an accepted standard of practice required for a forensic analysis.[25]

The Commission finds that Cavazos intentionally and deliberately altered the Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form after it was signed by the Senior Director of Quality and submitted it along with her renewal application for a license in both Seized Drugs and Toxicology (general, non-interpretive). This finding is based on several facts. First, the analyst applied seeking licensure in *both* Seized Drugs *and* Toxicology. Second, the number of steps required to alter the form signed by the Senior Director of Quality makes an unintentional alteration highly unlikely. The analyst would have to scroll to her name, click on the drop-down menu to select a particular discipline, and then scroll down the menu towards the bottom of the list and select "Seized Drugs" by clicking on the option. The analyst would then have to save the document as altered. Furthermore, the "Adobe glitch" explanation is contradicted by the records produced by the IT department that closed the ticket several days before the alteration was made. The fact that the

[25] 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.302(7) (2020).

disciplines selected in the altered form corresponds exactly with the license application supports the notion that this was an intentional alteration. The fact that the analyst was concerned about passing the ABFT certification exam and contemplated possibly returning to the Seized Drugs discipline if unsuccessful, lends support to the finding that this alteration was not accidental.

K. Cavazos violated the Texas Administrative Code (Code of Professional Responsibility for Forensic Analysts and Crime Laboratory Management) when she submitted an altered Proficiency Testing Certification to the Texas Forensic Science Commission.

The Texas Code of Professional Responsibility for Forensic Analysts provides that a forensic analyst shall accurately represent his/her education, training, experience and areas of expertise.[26] By submitting an altered PT Certification Form to the Commission for licensing as a Seized drugs Analyst, Cavazos misrepresented her training as including a passed proficiency test in the Seized Drugs discipline when in fact no such test had been taken for the time period in question.

IV. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

On a determination by the Commission that a license holder violated a rule or order of the Commission under Article 38.01, Code of Criminal Procedure, the Commission may: (1) revoke or suspend the person's license; (2) refuse to renew the person's license; (3) reprimand the license holder; or (4) deny the person a license.[27]

Factors considered in determining the appropriate disciplinary action against a license holder may include: (1) the seriousness of the violation; (2) the prevalence of misconduct by the individual; (3) the person's conduct history, including any investigative history by the

[26] 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.219 (2020).
[27] 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.216(a)(1)-(4) (2024).

Commission; (4) the harm or potential harm to the laboratory or criminal justice system as a whole; (5) attempts to conceal the act by the individual; and (6) any other relevant factors.[28]

The Commission also may decide one or more of the following factors warrants less severe or less restrictive disciplinary action in a particular investigation: (1) candor in addressing the violation, including self-reported and voluntary admissions of the misconduct or violation; (2) acknowledgement of wrongdoing and willingness to cooperate with the Commission; (3) changes made by the individual to ensure compliance and prevent future misconduct; (4) rehabilitative potential; (5) other relevant circumstances reducing the seriousness of the misconduct; or (6) other relevant circumstances lessening responsibility for the misconduct.[29] The license holder has the burden to present evidence regarding any mitigating factor that may apply.[30]

The Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form is a signed certification that establishes a critical component of the criteria for issuing or renewing a Forensic Analyst license. Based on the totality of the information available including interviews and the documentary record, the Commission finds that Cavazos displayed a serious lapse in judgment by altering the form to add the "Seized Drugs" discipline after it was signed by the Senior Director of Quality and then submitting it to the Commission. This constitutes a serious violation because it goes to the integrity of the analyst's qualifications under the law and could in turn call into question the integrity of the laboratory as a whole. The Commission does not view the analyst's "Adobe glitch" explanation as credible, in part because of the number of steps it takes to make the selection she made, in part because the "error" just happened to be the same discipline she had previously sought to maintain, and in part because she had opportunity to remedy a true error if she had simply checked the form

[28] *Id*. at § 651.216(c)(1)(A)-(E) (2024).
[29] *Id.* at § 651.216(c)(2)(A)-(F) (2024).
[30] *Id*. at § 651.216(c)(3) (2024).

saved properly. Notwithstanding these finding, there is no showing of prior misconduct by the analyst and the analyst has no prior disciplinary history with the Commission.

Cavazos' Forensic Analyst license expires on January 31, 2026, but her license is currently "inactive" because she is not currently employed by a Texas accredited laboratory. Based on the serious nature of the violation involved, the Commission suspends Cavazos' Forensic Analyst license through January 31, 2026 (the current expiration date of her license).[31] Were Cavazos to obtain new employment as a forensic analyst or technician at a Texas accredited laboratory and apply to reactivate or renew her license, the Commission will deny or refuse to renew the license until January 31, 2028, and may impose conditions for licensure at that time as permitted by Commission rule.

V. APPEALS PROCESS

Any finding by the Commission that includes disciplinary action against a license holder (revocation, suspension, probation, etc.) may be appealed to the Judicial Branch Certification Commission (JBCC).[32] A written request for a hearing before the JBCC must be received by the Commission or by the JBCC within twenty (20) days after the date the notice of the disciplinary action is received, or the Commission's decision becomes final and is not subject to further review by the JBCC or the Commission.[33]

VI. CORRECTIVE ACTION

The analyst was terminated by HCIFS on January 3, 2025. Accreditation bodies and District Attorney's Offices were notified. The Quality Division verified the correct categories and

[31] The effective date of a suspension is determined by commission rule 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.402(c)-(e), which permits final disposition by 1) expiration of a 20-day period after the date the license holder or crime laboratory receives notice of the final investigative report; 2) appeal and final hearing by the Judicial Branch Certification Commission; or 3) by agreement in the form of a stipulation, a settlement agreement, or a consent order.
[32] *Id.* at § 651.402(c) (2024).
[33] *Id.*

dates were reflected by the Commission for all other HCIFS employees. The laboratory does not believe any data reported by the analyst was compromised and determined that no court proceedings were impacted as the analyst never testified and does not have any pending subpoenas.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission is authorized to make recommendations to the community, but due to the isolated nature of the incident that is the subject of this disclosure, the Commission does not have any general recommendations for the forensic community with respect to the findings contained in this report. However, the Commission is revising its process for proficiency certification to mitigate the possibility of alterations to the proficiency monitoring certification form after it has been completed and signed by laboratory management.

EXHIBIT A

Self-Disclosure Details

Status

In Review

Proficiency Testing

Does this disclosure relate to a non-consensus result for a proficiency test or other proficiency monitoring activity?

No

Laboratory and Representative Completing Disclosure

Laboratory/Other Entity

Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

Completed By

Michal Pierce, Senior Director, Quality Management

Self-Disclosure

Approximate Date when issue(s) described in the self-disclosure first occurred

11/24/2024

Date laboratory identified issue(s) described in the self-disclosure

12/09/2024

Type(s) of Forensic Analysis

Seized Drugs; Toxicology (Blood Alcohol); Toxicology (Substances other than Alcohol)

Date the laboratory provided notice of the issues described in the self-disclosure to its accrediting body

01/06/2025

Description of the Non-Conformance

A laboratory analyst who works in the Forensic Toxicology Laboratory and who has only been proficiency tested in the area of forensic toxicology since 2021, applied for dual TFSC licensure in 2022 and again in 2024 -- in the disciplines of toxicology and seized drugs. Furthermore, she altered the Proficiency Testing Certification Form that was completed and signed by the Senior Director of Quality Management prior to submitting for licensure renewal in 2024, falsely indicating she had been proficiency tested in the discipline of seized drugs.

Laboratory Investigation and Identification of Root Cause Analysis

When asked in person how and why an altered version of the form was submitted for licensure renewal, the analyst stated: "When I received the signed form I must have messed with LaToya Binder's drop downs on the form. I meant to put it back the way it was for LaToya. But then I must have clicked the wrong box, the one above hers, which was the one below mine. And I did not notice I had clicked on the seized drugs box under mine, instead of hers, since the boxes are so close together. And I saved the form on my desktop and then uploaded that for my licensure application." Once the Senior Director of Quality Management was alerted to the analyst's submission of an altered form, an investigation ensued with the Senior Director of Crime Lab Services and the Director of Forensic Toxicology. Investigation revealed repeated instances of the analyst voicing to Quality Management personnel her understanding of no longer being proficiency tested in seized drugs, yet also an intentional pursual of licensure in that discipline without Quality Management's or upper laboratory management's knowledge. At no time after 2021 did the analyst request to be put back on the proficiency test schedule for seized drugs.

Description of Corrective Action(s) Taken by the Laboratory

Analyst was terminated on January 3, 2025. Accreditation bodies and District Attorney's Office were notified. The TFSC website was reviewed to verify all other IFS crime lab employees are licensed under the correct categories and dates.

Casework Impact

This is an integrity issue, not an issue with casework performance. Given all the quality and review measures built into the analysis and reporting process, there is no reason to believe any data reported by this analyst was compromised. Furthermore, court proceedings have not been impacted. She has never testified, nor does she have any pending subpoenas at this time.

Summary of Notification to Stakeholders

Stakeholders Notified?: Yes
Stakeholder Notification Date: 01/03/2025
How Notified: Harris County District Attorney's Office disclosure policy was followed by notifying them via email and memo about a potential impeachable witness issue and the need to place this individual in their database for any future cases where she is issued a subpoena.

Known Defendant(s) Associated With the Forensic Analysis

None Identified

Individual(s) With Direct Knowledge of Events That are the Subject of This Disclosure

Name
Ms Katie Welch

Role in the Matter
Senior Director, Crime Lab Services

Name
Dr Teresa Gray

Role in the Matter
Director, Forensic Toxicology

Misconduct/Agency Notification

Does the laboratory believe the events that are the subject of this disclosure constitute professional misconduct?

Yes

Are you aware of anyone involved in this disclosure (other than the defendant) being the subject of a criminal investigation regarding the matters described in the disclosure?

No

General/Miscellaneous Documents

General/Miscellaneous Document(s)

File Name	File Options	Public Viewable
101724-proficiency-testing-certification-form-Dec24 A.pdf	View	No
101724-proficiency-testing-certification-form-Dec24 B.pdf	View	No
Email thread analyst to Pierce 12-9-24.pdf	View	No
[illegible]	[illegible]	[illegible]

Email thread analyst to Shaw 6-01-21.pdf	View	No
Email thread analys to Shaw 02-2020.pdf	View	No
Cavazos_CV_20240423.pdf	View	No
Cavazos termination memo 1-3-2025.pdf	View	No

History

Contact Us

For Technical Assistance: support@txcourts.gov For General Assistance: info@fsc.texas.gov

C. Cavazos added Seized Drugs to her TFSC licensure in 2022 and 2024 despite not being proficiency tested in that discipline - Investigation notes and timeline

12/6/24	During one-on-one meeting Cassandra Cavazos (CLC) asked Teresa Gray (TG) about whether she should maintain her drug chemistry license or drop it. CLC was advised to consult with Micky Pierce (MLP).
12/9/24	CLC emailed MLP, stating that she had been maintaining her Seized Drugs and Tox license since 2018. CLC asked whether it was OK for her to maintain both as she had not been proficiency tested in Seized Drugs since 2019.
12/9/24	MLP responded via email that CLC should have only renewed under Tox as MLP did not add Seized Drugs to the required certification form for CLC's 2024 license renewal.
12/9/24	CLC responded via email asking who at TFSC should be contacted to correct the license.
12/9/24	MLP responded via email that she (MLP) would send the necessary form on CLC's behalf and tried confirming that CLC was renewed for both disciplines despite only having a PT form for Tox.
12/9/24	CLC confirmed via email that she was renewed recently for both disciplines and provided a screen shot of the PT form that was turned into TFSC. CLC states that "when I went through it the first time, I inadvertently messed with the drop down box on mine and LaToya Binder's disciplines. I've must've saved it incorrectly and appeared to have submitted the wrong one which makes sense now why it got approved in the first place."
12/9/24	MLP requests via email that CLC send her the PT form sent to TFSC.
12/9/24	CLC sends form via email to MLP.
12/9/24	CLC asks TG in person whether TG had spoken to MLP about her license and said that she was afraid for her job. CLC explained that the PT form was messed up for her and LaToya because of an Adobe glitch. TG responded that she had not heard from MLP.
12/9/24	MLP calls TG and discusses email correspondence between MLP and CLC from the morning. TG relays the content of her conversation with CLC from that morning. MLP confirms that the PT form sent to CLC on 10/17/24 correctly lists her as completing only a toxicology PT.
12/9/24	MLP, TG, and CLC meet in person. CLC relays the same story to MLP about how she clicked on the drop down menu, inadvertently changing it and changing it back to (what she thought) was the original setting. CLC asked about the security of her job. MLP told her that it was too early to comment on that since she has to inform the Commission that an altered form was submitted for licensure renewal application.
12/10/24	MLP asked CLC to email her the PT form she sent to TFSC for her 2022 application. It was the same form MLP signed and sent to her in 2022.
12/10/24	MLP and Katie Welch (KW) discussed the situation and decided CLC should be removed from casework pending further investigation.
12/10/24	Using the native audit trail feature in Adobe, it is clear that CLC did change the dropdown menu for her own disciplines on her saved copy of the PT

	form after MLP signed the certification. The audit trail does not show a change when a dropdown menu is changed to a new value then changed back to the original value prior to resaving; therefore, cannot determine if CLC did change the drop down for LaToya.
12/10/24	TG spoke to CLC via phone informing her that she would be removed from casework. CLC was instructed to complete non-casework activities, such as training and to review casework batches as part of staff performance evaluations.
12/10/24	MLP was to reach out to TFSC to give a heads up and to possibly obtain information about the renewal applications from their end.
12/11/24	CLC emailed TG seeking clarification on who would replace her on casework activities. She also asked questions assuming an imminent departure from HCIFS.
12/11/24	TG emailed CLC back, confirming that she (TG) would make the necessary casework arrangements and that making plans regarding employment or licensure status were premature.
12/12/24	MLP had preliminary discussion with Lynn Garcia from TFSC. Ms. Garcia was going to pull CLC's 2022 renewal application, but further discussions were necessary.
12/12/24	MLP, TG and KW meet to discuss MLP's conversation with Ms. Garcia. Per Ms. Garcia, CLC's 2022 application could not be found within the TopClass system; therefore, TFSC would need to reach out to TopClass to obtain more information on where the application is. TG was asked whether there were any previous ethics or performance concerns for CLC. TG replied that they were only minor issues, such as time management or developing supervisory skills, but she would review previous performance evaluations and check with CLC's previous toxicology supervisor, Dr. Strickland (ECS), to confirm. MLP also relayed from Ms. Garcia that CLC had emailed TFSC in 2022, after her application was submitted, asking them to add seized drugs to her license.
12/12/2024	TG reviewed previous performance evaluations and discussed with ECS. ECS could recall no ethical concerns and no major performance issues. This was relayed to MLP and KW via email.
12/12/2024	ECS emailed TG with a summary of her reviewed notes regarding either licensing or certification. Per the email: in 2020, ECS and CLC discussed her ABC Certification in Drugs and obtaining sufficient CE. At this time, CLC said she was switching or was going to investigate switching her certification to the diplomate certification as there was no PT requirement for the diplomate. [ABC then changed their regulations, so a PT is no longer required for any level]. Per ECS, she informed CLC that ABC certification was voluntary for her at that point, given her permanent status in the Toxicology Lab [CLC began transitioning from the Seized Drugs Lab to Toxicology in 2019, and worked in both labs during that year]. Also in June 2022, ECS and CLC discussed whether she needed to renew her seized drug license but could not recall the outcome. She found no other notes between ECS and TG or ECS and CLC addressing this issue.

12/13/24	MLP provided an email from Laura Shaw (LJS) who reviewed her emails for any communications from CLC that would be relevant. LJS sent the following: 2/13/2020 Attachment (RE: Proficiency Tests): CLC asking to be added to SOP revisions for Seized Drugs to maintain TFSC licensure in Seized Drugs and ABC fellow certification 6/1/2021 Attachment (RE: CLC Q-pulse Acknowledgements): **CLC stating that she only renewed for Toxicology and not Seized Drugs for TSFC license in 12/2020, citing lack of proficiency in Seized Drugs,** and asked to be removed from distribution list for Seized Drugs SOP revisions. 12/7/2022 Attachment (FW: Forensic License Application Approved for CC): No attachment or statement of Seized Drugs vs. Tox
12/16/24	Ms. Tomlin forwarded CLC's email from 2022 asking TFSC to add Seized Drugs to her renewal application. The TFSC rep asked her to confirm that she wanted to add Seized Drugs to the categories already selected - Toxicology (General, Non-interpretive) category was initially the only category selected in the application. CLCL confirmed. There was no discussion or request for a PT certification form for seized drugs.
12/30/24	TG reviewed CLC's past CVs, which showed she was only licensed in toxicology in the 2020-2022 cycle and then dually licensed in toxicology and seized drugs 2022-2024.
1/3/25	KW, MLP, and TG meet with CLC to ask her again to explain why she pursued dual licensure for the past two cycles, and how she changed the 2024 PT form. CLC stated she did not know she needed to be proficiency tested in seized drugs to maintain dual licensure. She re-stated her claim that she changed the form inadvertently and did not know she submitted the wrong form to the TFSC.
1/3/25	CLC's employment is terminated

From the available documentation, including her curriculum vitae, CLC intentionally dropped the seized drugs license in 2020 citing her discontinuation of seized drug proficiency testing as a reason. The seized drugs licensure was added back in 2022 at her request, but proficiency test documentation was neither provided by CLC nor requested by TFSC. In 2024, she renewed for both seized drugs and toxicology, providing a proficiency test certification form that was altered to reflect completion of both seized drugs and toxicology proficiency testing. Shortly after submitting the renewal application, CLC questioned whether she should be licensed in seized drugs, recognizing the lack of proficiency testing.

- Per TFSC website, CLC has been dually licensed as an analyst in seized drugs and toxicology (general, non-interpretive) since 12/10/2018. Emails from the TFSC confirming renewal do not provide the discipline.

- CLC has voiced concern for her ability to earn ABFT certification by her May 31, 2025 deadline; ABFT certification is required of all HCIFS toxicologists within three years of eligibility.

- When interviewed the first time, CLC first cited an Adobe "glitch" as the reason her form was altered and later stated she clicked the dropdowns erroneously.

- The "Seized Drugs Analyst" option on the dropdown menu is fairly far down on the list (i.e., you have to scroll down to select it, it is not one of the first options to select).

- The first sentence of the PT certification form is "All licensed analysts and technicians, whether voluntary of mandatory licensees, must participate in a proficiency monitoring program that corresponds to the forensic analyst or forensic technician's specific forensic discipline and job duties."

- The last sentence at the bottom of the TFSC licensure application starts with: "By checking the box below and marking today's date, I certify under penalty of perjury that the information represented herein is true and correct..."

If CLC had inadvertently changed the Proficiency Certification Form, she could have closed the document without saving the changes, gone back to use the original document in the email from MLP, or contacted any number of people to assist.

If CLC had questions about whether or not she was eligible for Seized Drugs licensure or needed it for testimony purposes, she should have asked either TG, KW, or MLP directly, *prior to* submitting her application.

If CLC had asked to be put back on the Seized Drugs proficiency test schedule at any point after 2020, we would have obliged once she completed necessary re-familiarization and/or training.

EXHIBIT B

Dear Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC) Staff,

I am writing in response to the FSC Disclosure No. 25.01; Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences (HCIFS), which states that I, Cassandra Cavazos-Johnson, "intentionally" modified my Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form to include the forensic discipline Seized Drugs as one of my license discipline categories after my employing laboratory's Senior Director of Quality Management signed and distributed the form certifying I was proficiency tested in toxicology only. It further claims that I knowingly submitted this modified document to the Commission with my renewal application, despite not being current in proficiency testing for Seized Drugs. I declare that I did not perform these actions intentionally or knowingly.

Firstly, I acknowledge that I submitted a modified Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form listing Seized Drugs as one of my licensed disciplines after it was signed by the Senior Director of Quality Management. However, this modification was not intentional. The form was emailed to me as an electronically signed Adobe PDF; however, this was not locked and was therefore editable. Since this was a newer version of the Proficiency Monitoring Certification Form (revision which included other analysts from other laboratories), I scrolled down to search for my name as it was a lengthy list. At that point, it was common for me to have malfunctions and delays on my work computer with Adobe PDFs when it came to clicking specific areas, saving, annotating, electronic signatures and the current page not lining up properly when scrolling. This could also be due to my computer no longer receiving software updates and/or because Adobe was open for too long with multiple PDFs opened at once. When scrolling to my name to make sure it was there, I inadvertently adjusted the analyst, LaToya Binder's discipline who was listed below me. If I recall correctly, Adobe malfunctioned here because I do recall attempting this correction a few times. I assumed I corrected this to how I originally received it before I saved it to my computer to be uploaded to TopClass. I discovered this error during an email discussion with the Quality Manager, Michal Pierce, on December 9, 2024. The line above Ms. Binder's name also ended up being changed to Seized Drugs which does read like I was listed to be proficient in both disciplines. The page display must have been off again when I was trying to correct the drop-down on Ms. Binder's discipline, and therefore I also selected the drop-down right above her name during the few attempts I made. I understand that such Adobe-related mishaps are uncommon, but this was an unintentional oversight on my part. I believed the form I submitted correctly indicated proficiency in toxicology only and did not notice the mistake before submission.

Additionally, I acknowledge that I rushed my renewal application after my ABFT (American Board of Forensic Toxicology) exam on November 20, 2024. Following an email reminder on November 22, 2024, I hurried to submit my application within the 15-day review period to avoid any lapse in licensure. This urgency contributed to my lack of thoroughness. I recognize now that I could have taken steps to ensure the accuracy of my submission. I had no intention of falsely claiming proficiency in Seized Drugs, as there is clear documentation proving I was not proficient in this discipline. I have consistently adhered to ethical standards and understood the consequences of falsifying documents.

Secondly, I would like to address the rather complicated matter of knowing I should've have not applied for both disciplines on my licensure when I was no longer proficient in Seized Drugs. I am aware the emails from February 2020 and June 2021 make it seem like I did have this knowledge but allow me to explain. I was never asked about these emails and other findings prior to my termination, and I did not automatically remember these conversations all those years ago until these emails were mentioned in my one and only discussion with the Crime Laboratory Director, Katie Welch. Now that I have had time to recollect, I did want to first state that early in my career at HCIFS, I was told when requesting anything in email to Quality Management, add your reason for your request.

In the February 2020 email, *I* apparently did know to ask about being proficient. Unfortunately, pre-pandemic, I cannot recall all the knowledge I had of this or if I was given any kind of instruction prior to this email. It is entirely possible I was listing reasons on why I should be included in the Drug Chemistry proficiency round that year even though I was no longer employed in that department. I did want to maintain my ABC (American Board of Criminalistics) certification which I worked hard to obtain. I know it does not interpret this way, but I likely just included the 'TFSC license in Seized Drugs and Toxicology' part for further justification on needing the proficiency because the license itself already listed both disciplines. I do not believe I would have requested to be proficient in Seized Drugs for my TFSC license alone or that I knew to be proficient to maintain that specific title. Additionally, in the June 2021 email, I listed reasons to be removed from Drug Chemistry's Standard Operating Procedure acknowledgments in Q-Pulse only. The reasons were because I was not proficient in DCL for over a year and because my TFSC license title was only re-newed for Toxicology and not Seized Drugs. I never stated that I was no longer proficient *because* I wanted the Seized Drug title removed. In this email, I am more than sure that I did not realize that I had to be proficient in Drug Chemistry to maintain the Seized Drug title.

Every two years, I struggled to recall the exact requirements for the renewal process, which was common among my colleagues. However, I was the only toxicology department employee with multiple license titles, and I can state that I am unsure I was ever fully clear on the proficiency requirements. By the end of 2020, I did not include Seized Drugs in my renewal application because I was no longer performing casework in Drug Chemistry. Additionally, the ABC re-certification process no longer required proficiency forms so the topic of being proficiency tested in both disciplines no longer occurred to me until December 2024.

I did discuss in a 2022 one-on-one meeting with my supervisor at the time, Erin Strickland, about getting her opinion on maintaining both my certification and about the Seized Drugs license title since I was still getting subpoenaed on drug cases for testimony. Neither of us have documentation on the exact conversation, but I do recall also asking her at one point if it was wrong to not have both disciplines because there was still the possibility I could testify in a drug case. I do not believe Dr. Strickland ever instructed me to ask Quality Management about being proficient again in Drug Chemistry in order to add back the Seized Drug title. I know I would have consulted with Quality Management if that was plainly re-stated to me since testing would have needed to have occurred before my renewal. By the end of 2022, I honestly did not know that TFSC would have required proficiencies for each discipline claimed. I thought it would be easier to have both titles again for the

sake of being consistent with the types of subpoenas I was receiving. This is what prompted me to email TFSC to correct my license title since I believe I did meet the continuing education requirements for both disciplines. The proficiency form submitted in 2022 was correct only stating Toxicology as the discipline. I was not informed by TFSC that I could not add both disciplines because I did not have the proficiency form for Seized Drugs. The approval of change further confirmed to me that just having the continuing education hours was sufficient to have both disciplines. It also never occurred to me to inform Quality Management of this change. Additionally, the changes and dates of my license titles were accurately reflected on my staff CV. As I understand it, each year staff CVs are updated and reviewed by their supervisor to make sure their listed credentials are accurately reflected before being submitted to be put on the e-Discovery website. I am unsure if Quality Management does any other review. My supervisor, the Toxicology Manager, never asked me or confirmed if I was being proficiency tested in Drug Chemistry when the Seized Drugs title came back. I assume this type of Manager would be aware if one of their employees was proficient in more than one discipline but am not clear on this process.

When I reapplied in December 2024, I again believed I met the continuing education requirements for both disciplines but inadvertently submitted the modified proficiency form. After submission, I discussed my licensure with Dr. Gray in our one-on-one meeting that followed. I asked if I should have again dropped Seized Drugs and the main reason behind this was because I was no longer receiving subpoenas for drug cases. The only thing technically missing from the statement in the Investigation notes and timeline from December 06, 2024, was that the conversation prompted me to finally ask Dr. Gray if it was a requirement to be proficient in both disciplines. She stated she did not think so, but she did not know for sure and to consult with Michal Pierce, which I did the following Monday.

Lastly, the conversation I started with the Quality Manager brought all these mistakes to light. I did admit to modifying the proficiency form to her as soon as I realized it was incorrect, and I was also nothing but honest about my current misunderstanding of the dual discipline proficiency requirements. I understand the past emails I sent do not justify my lack of misunderstanding, however, if there were proper records of my conversations with my supervisors, it would show how misinformed I was on this matter. Additionally, my only meeting with Michal Pierce and Teresa Gray on the subject at the time the incident was discovered was rather brief (estimated 15-minute conversation) and I never received any follow-up questions from either of them on this matter except for Ms. Pierce asking for a copy of the 2022 proficiency form I sent. In Ms. Pierce's email from December 09, 2024, she did state at the beginning that she would email TFSC to correct the dual discipline. When I discovered the form was also incorrect, I assumed the correct proficiency form could have also been sent explaining the situation since my renewal date had not yet begun. In our meeting she did seem upset about the form that had her signature on it, which I completely understand. However, because I was being honest about the mistake I thought this could be resolved. Her demeanor suddenly had me believe my job might be on the line, which is why I asked if that was a possibility. I was taken off casework pending the TFSC decision on how to oversee this matter. In the days that followed, I did speak to my supervisor, Dr. Gray, my fears as I had previously done before about other personal matters, and her responses were summed up to not overreact.

Furthermore, Dr. Gray instructed me to continue my in-house training and performance evaluations, however, I was still actively on the lab schedule for the coming weeks. I was told this was because we were waiting for the Quality Manager to discuss with the commission on how to proceed with this situation but was told this discussion kept getting postponed. So naturally, I expected the meeting on my termination day with the Crime Laboratory Director to be about discussing the commission's decision and then if an investigation was going to be launched. I was not provided the opportunity to view or discuss all HCIFS findings and fully explain as I have in this written request before my termination was already decided.

Throughout my 10 years at HCIFS, I had no prior performance issues, investigations, or ethical violations. I have always believed in honesty and transparency about mistakes. Unfortunately, this incident led to the end of my career with HCIFS, jeopardizing my family's livelihood. I sincerely regret my lack of thoroughness and understanding during the renewal process.

I plead with the Texas Forensic Science Commission to consider the unintentional nature of my actions and my honesty in addressing this matter. I respectfully request the Texas Commission of Forensic Sciences allow me to continue my career with the least possible disciplinary action and ask that my statements be taken into account as my truth.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard.

Sincerely,

Cassandra Cavazos-Johnson

01/26/2025

EXHIBIT C

From: Licensing
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS)
Subject: RE: Texas Forensic Science Commission - Application Received Notice
Date: Friday, November 18, 2022 7:54:00 AM
Attachments: image001.jpg

RE: #0000474, Cassandra Cavazos
Hi Cassandra,
All done. Your renewal application was updated to include the disciplines:
Seized Drugs Analyst; Toxicology Analyst (General, Non-interpretive)
Thanks for notifying us about this!
Rodney Soward
Program Specialist
Texas Forensic Science Commission
Office: 512-936-0770

Licensing@fsc.texas.gov

From: Licensing
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2022 7:42 AM
To: 'Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS)' [redacted]
Subject: RE: Texas Forensic Science Commission - Application Received Notice
RE: #0000474, Cassandra Cavazos
Hi Cassandra,
Thanks for confirming.
TopClass will not permit an application to be modified while the status is SUBMITED-IN REVIEW. It will be necessary to REJECT it so TopClass will permit this update.
While we are in the process of doing this, you will receive a REJECTION notice that will automatically be sent by TopClass. This action is unavoidable, TopClass was designed to function this way.
PLEASE DISREGARD THIS NOTICE. It will not be necessary for you to do anything – TFSC will make this update for you.
Once TFSC updates your renewal application to include both disciplines, it will be updated once again to SUBMITTED-IN REVIEW.
I'll contact you again when we're finished.
Rodney Soward
Program Specialist
Texas Forensic Science Commission
Office: 512-936-0770

Licensing@fsc.texas.gov

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2022 7:27 AM
To: Licensing <Licensing@fsc.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Texas Forensic Science Commission - Application Received Notice
Yes I wish to update to both disciplines Seized Drugs Analyst and Toxicology Analyst (General, Non-

interpretive).

Thank you!

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., ABC-DA
Toxicologist 1
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Licensing <Licensing@fsc.texas.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2022 7:25 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Subject: RE: Texas Forensic Science Commission - Application Received Notice

RE: #0000474, Cassandra Cavazos
Good Morning Cassandra,

You selected only (1) discipline on your renewal application: Toxicology Analyst (General, Non-interpretive)
Was your intention to include the following? Seized Drugs Analyst; Toxicology Analyst (General, Non-interpretive)

We'll be able to mark an updated discipline(s) if you wish.
Thanks,
Rodney Soward
Program Specialist
Texas Forensic Science Commission
Office: 512-936-0770

Licensing@fsc.texas.gov

From: NOREPLY-EXTERNAL <NOREPLY-EXTERNAL@txcourts.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 18, 2022 6:39 AM
To: Licensing <Licensing@fsc.texas.gov>
Subject: RE: Texas Forensic Science Commission - Application Received Notice

Good morning,

I wanted to confirm if I had selected both seized drugs and toxicology (general, non-interpretive) for my license. If not, how do I update? Thank you!

Sent from TopClass LMS

EXHIBIT D

TEXAS FORENSIC
SCIENCE COMMISSION
Justice Through Science
1700 North Congress Ave., Suite 445
Austin, Texas 78701

PROFICIENCY MONITORING CERTIFICATION FORM

Proficiency Monitoring Requirement for Texas Licensure

All licensed analysts and technicians, whether voluntary or mandatory licensees, must participate in a proficiency monitoring program that corresponds to the forensic analyst or forensic technician's specific forensic discipline and job duties. To demonstrate compliance, forensic analyst and forensic technician license applicants are required to submit this certification form signed by their employing laboratory's authorized representative indicating the applicant participates in the laboratory's process for intra-laboratory comparison, inter-laboratory comparison, proficiency testing, or observation-based monitoring requirements in compliance with and on the timeline set forth by either (1) the laboratory's accrediting body's requirements if employed at an accredited laboratory and licensed in an accredited forensic discipline; or (2) the laboratory or employing entity's Commission-approved process for proficiency monitoring if employed at an unaccredited laboratory or practicing in a forensic discipline not covered by the laboratory's accreditation.

The Commission is aware that failing an intra/interlaboratory comparison, proficiency test, or observation-based monitoring exercise does *not* automatically render a person out of conformance with the accrediting body's testing requirements. However, disclosure of failed proficiency tests and associated remediation must be reported to the Commission by all laboratories pursuant to the laboratory's duty to report communications with its accrediting body in compliance with Texas Administrative Code § 651.8.

Each laboratory only needs to sign this form once and attach a list of all forensic analyst and/or technician names and update the form as its list of qualified employees changes. The Commission understands that some employee positions, disciplines or job duties are not required to complete proficiency monitoring activities or exercises. Employees in positions with job duties not required to be tested must be included on this form to confirm compliance and designate their category of licensure. **The form must be distributed to your employees for uploading to their license applications in TopClass.**

Laboratory Name:

Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

Laboratory Representative/Director:

Michal Pierce, Senior Director of Qualit

Laboratory's National Accrediting Body:

ANAB

Certification Part 1 (of 2):

Names of employees *and* corresponding license categories of those who are currently in compliance with the laboratory accrediting body's intra-laboratory comparison, inter-laboratory comparison, proficiency testing, or observation-based monitoring requirements in accordance with each employee's currently authorized forensic discipline and job duties.[1]

Please include analyst and technician names and corresponding license categories below: If you have employees with more than 2 license categories, please list them in the fillable text box on Page 3.

Sarah Bowden	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Tori Hlavaty	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Zury Balvina Phillips	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Anna Timanova	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Elizabeth Torres	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline

Please list any additional employees beginning on page 4 of this document and attach additional pages as necessary.

[1] The license category listed for each individual licensee must correspond with the individual's current job duties at the laboratory and the category of licensure in which the forensic analyst or forensic technician actively performs forensic casework or is currently authorized or is currently participating in a training program to become authorized to perform supervised or independent forensic casework. (e.g., an individual who is hired as a forensic biology screener who intends to promote to DNA analyst should not be listed as a DNA analyst until the individual formally transitions into the DNA analyst position, even if the individual otherwise meets the qualifications for licensure as a DNA analyst.)

Certification Part 2 (of 2)

I hereby certify that each person listed in **Certification Part 1** above is currently in compliance with all applicable laboratory accrediting body or Commission-approved proficiency monitoring requirements that correspond with the forensic analyst or forensic technician's specific forensic discipline as designated in **Certification Part 1**.

Michal Pierce, M.S.

Laboratory Representative/Director Printed Name

Michal Pierce Digitally signed by Michal Pierce DN: cn=Michal Pierce, o=HCIFS, ou=Quality Management, email=Michal.Pierce@ifs.hcbi.net, c=US Date: 2024.10.17 15:18:39 -05'00'

Laboratory Representative/Director Signature

10/17/2024

DATE

THIS COMPLETED FORM MUST BE UPLOADED TO EACH INDIVIDUAL LICENSEE'S APPLICATION IN TOPCLASS.

Certification Part 1, Continued

Joseph Truppi	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Erika Flournoy	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Elise Bazile	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Mario Galioto	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Paola Gandara	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Sabrina Hodge	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Chelsie Testerman	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Wendi Phelps	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Brenda Quintanilla	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline

Jonathan Steege	Toxicologist Analyst (General, Non-Interpre
	Please Select Discipline
Andrew Greenwood	Toxicologist (Interpretive)
	Please Select Discipline
Francisco Chavez	Toxicologist Analyst (General, Non-Interpre
	Please Select Discipline
Collin Clay	Toxicology Technician
	Please Select Discipline
Jason Gaswint	Toxicologist (Interpretive)
	Please Select Discipline
Cassandra Cavazos	Toxicologist Analyst (General, Non-Interpre
	Seized Drugs Analyst
LaToya Binder	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Michael Lara	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Kristen Head	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline

James Ross	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Tammy Lyons	Firearms/Toolmarks Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Shannon Casey	Firearms/Toolmarks Analyst
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EXHIBIT E

Pierce, Michal (IFS)

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS)
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2024 10:41 AM
To: Pierce, Michal (IFS)
Subject: RE: C. Cavazos Consult on TFSC License
Attachments: 101724-proficiency-testing-certification-form-Dec24.pdf

This was the version I must've submitted which was incorrectly saved.

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., ABC-DA
Toxicologist 1 Specialist
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2024 10:37 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) <Cassandra.Cavazos@ifs.hctx.net>
Subject: RE: C. Cavazos Consult on TFSC License

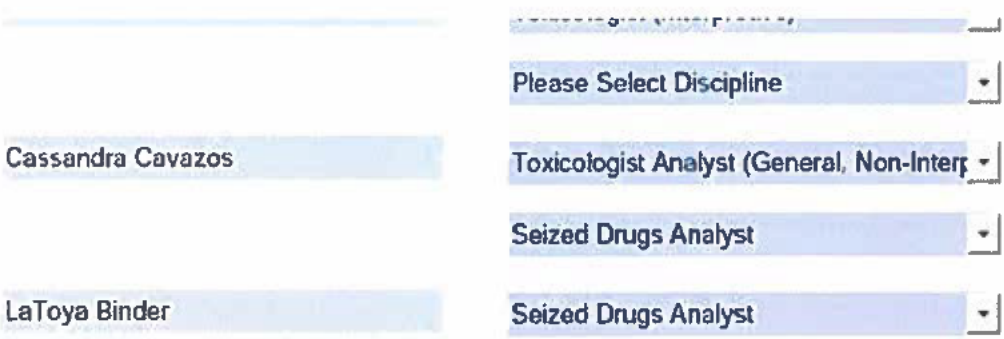
Please email me the version of the PT form you submitted to the TFSC.

Micky Pierce, MS, ASQ CMQ/OE
Senior Director, Quality Management
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2024 10:04 AM
To: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Subject: RE: C. Cavazos Consult on TFSC License

I did renew recently for both disciplines and got approved.

However, I just checked the PT form that I submitted. When I went through it the first time I inadvertently messed with the drop down box on mine and LaToya Binder's disciplines. I must've saved it incorrectly and appeared to have submitted the wrong one which makes sense now why it got approved in the first place.



This was not my intention as I know I have only had PT for Tox. So I apologize for the inconvenience I have caused.

Please let me know what further information you require of me.

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., ABC-DA
Toxicologist 1 Specialist
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2024 9:54 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Subject: RE: C. Cavazos Consult on TFSC License

There is a form to make the correction. I can send it on your behalf. Just so I'm clear – you renewed recently, and they renewed you for both disciplines, despite the PT form only saying Tox?

Micky Pierce, MS, ASQ CMQ/OE
Senior Director, Quality Management
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2024 9:52 AM
To: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <t>
Subject: RE: C. Cavazos Consult on TFSC License

Ok thank you for clearing this up.

So my next should be to reach out to TFSC to correct this?

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., ABC-DA
Toxicologist 1 Specialist
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2024 9:47 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Subject: RE: C. Cavazos Consult on TFSC License

Good morning,
I remember not adding seized drugs to your PT cert form, so you should only have renewed licensure under the Tox discipline. You should not try to maintain the dual licensure at this point, due to not maintaining proficiency. If you are called to testify for an old drug case, you can still testify because you were licensed while you performed work in seized drugs.

Thank you

Micky Pierce, MS, ASQ CMQ/OE
Senior Director, Quality Management

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Sent: Monday, December 9, 2024 9:43 AM
To: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Subject: C. Cavazos Consult on TFSC License

Good morning,

I had a question about the title on my TFSC license. I recently just renewed and I have still been keeping both Seized Drugs and Toxicology (General, Non-Interpretive) in my title since 2018.

I wanted to ask if this is still ok for me to do at this point if I have not technically been proficiency tested in Drug Chem since 2019 (I believe was the last time)?

I wasn't sure if I could still be called to testify for a drug case after all this time so I still kept up the CE when I applied for renewal.

Please assist if able or guide me to the correct party.

Thank you,
Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., ABC-DA
Toxicologist 1 Specialist
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences
Toxicology, Crime Laboratory Service

harriscountytx.gov/ifs

EXHIBIT F

TEXAS FORENSIC
SCIENCE COMMISSION
Justice Through Science
1700 North Congress Ave., Suite 445
Austin, Texas 78701

PROFICIENCY MONITORING CERTIFICATION FORM

Proficiency Monitoring Requirement for Texas Licensure

All licensed analysts and technicians, whether voluntary or mandatory licensees, must participate in a proficiency monitoring program that corresponds to the forensic analyst or forensic technician's specific forensic discipline and job duties. To demonstrate compliance, forensic analyst and forensic technician license applicants are required to submit this certification form signed by their employing laboratory's authorized representative indicating the applicant participates in the laboratory's process for intra-laboratory comparison, inter-laboratory comparison, proficiency testing, or observation-based monitoring requirements in compliance with and on the timeline set forth by either (1) the laboratory's accrediting body's requirements if employed at an accredited laboratory and licensed in an accredited forensic discipline; or (2) the laboratory or employing entity's Commission-approved process for proficiency monitoring if employed at an unaccredited laboratory or practicing in a forensic discipline not covered by the laboratory's accreditation.

The Commission is aware that failing an intra/interlaboratory comparison, proficiency test, or observation-based monitoring exercise does *not* automatically render a person out of conformance with the accrediting body's testing requirements. However, disclosure of failed proficiency tests and associated remediation must be reported to the Commission by all laboratories pursuant to the laboratory's duty to report communications with its accrediting body in compliance with Texas Administrative Code § 651.8.

Each laboratory only needs to sign this form once and attach a list of all forensic analyst and/or technician names and update the form as its list of qualified employees changes. The Commission understands that some employee positions, disciplines or job duties are not required to complete proficiency monitoring activities or exercises. Employees in positions with job duties not required to be tested must be included on this form to confirm compliance and designate their category of licensure. **The form must be distributed to your employees for uploading to their license applications in TopClass.**

Laboratory Name:

Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

Laboratory Representative/Director:

Michal Pierce, Senior Director of Qualit

Laboratory's National Accrediting Body:

ANAB

Certification Part 1 (of 2):

Names of employees *and* corresponding license categories of those who are currently in compliance with the laboratory accrediting body's intra-laboratory comparison, inter-laboratory comparison, proficiency testing, or observation-based monitoring requirements in accordance with each employee's currently authorized forensic discipline and job duties.[1]

Please include analyst and technician names and corresponding license categories below: If you have employees with more than 2 license categories, please list them in the fillable text box on Page 3.

Sarah Bowden	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Tori Hlavaty	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Zury Balvina Phillips	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Anna Timanova	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Elizabeth Torres	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline

Please list any additional employees beginning on page 4 of this document and attach additional pages as necessary.

[1] The license category listed for each individual licensee must correspond with the individual's current job duties at the laboratory and the category of licensure in which the forensic analyst or forensic technician actively performs forensic casework or is currently authorized or is currently participating in a training program to become authorized to perform supervised or independent forensic casework. (e.g., an individual who is hired as a forensic biology screener who intends to promote to DNA analyst should not be listed as a DNA analyst until the individual formally transitions into the DNA analyst position, even if the individual otherwise meets the qualifications for licensure as a DNA analyst.)

Certification Part 2 (of 2)

I hereby certify that each person listed in **Certification Part 1** above is currently in compliance with all applicable laboratory accrediting body or Commission-approved proficiency monitoring requirements that correspond with the forensic analyst or forensic technician's specific forensic discipline as designated in **Certification Part 1**.

Michal Pierce, M.S.

Laboratory Representative/Director Printed Name

Michal Pierce Digitally signed by Michal Pierce
DN: cn=Michal Pierce, o=HCIFS, ou=Quality Management, email=Michal.Pierce@fs.hcbi.net, c=US
Date: 2024.10.17 15:18:39 -05'00'

Laboratory Representative/Director Signature

10/17/2024

DATE

THIS COMPLETED FORM MUST BE UPLOADED TO EACH INDIVIDUAL LICENSEE'S APPLICATION IN TOPCLASS.

Certification Part 1, Continued

Joseph Truppi	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Erika Flournoy	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Elise Bazile	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Mario Galioto	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Paola Gandara	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Sabrina Hodge	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Chelsie Testerman	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Wendi Phelps	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Brenda Quintanilla	Forensic Biology/DNA Analyst
	Please Select Discipline

Jonathan Steege	Toxicologist Analyst (General, Non-Interpre
	Please Select Discipline
Andrew Greenwood	Toxicologist (Interpretive)
	Please Select Discipline
Francisco Chavez	Toxicologist Analyst (General, Non-Interpre
	Please Select Discipline
Collin Clay	Toxicology Technician
	Please Select Discipline
Jason Gaswint	Toxicologist (Interpretive)
	Please Select Discipline
Cassandra Cavazos	Toxicologist Analyst (General, Non-Interpre
	Please Select Discipline
LaToya Binder	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Michael Lara	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Kristen Head	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline

James Ross	Seized Drugs Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Tammy Lyons	Firearms/Toolmarks Analyst
	Please Select Discipline
Shannon Casey	Firearms/Toolmarks Analyst
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EXHIBIT G

Pierce, Michal (IFS)

From: Pierce, Michal (IFS)
Sent: Wednesday, June 26, 2019 7:46 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS)
Subject: RE: Licensure

Yes, that is currently correct. "Training" can be in the form of conferences, in-house workshops, certain webinars, etc. The Commission is still working out the kinks in their continuing education program requirement, so there is nothing you need to do right now. We just want to be ahead of the game. Eventually you all will be self-reporting continuing ed through some site/portal to the Commission, probably TopClass. And the managers are all aware of this pending program, and QM will work with them to try and bring several continuing ed opportunities to the staff. More information will be provided to you once they finalize their program at the Commission.
But this is good to know – I'll make a note of your double discipline licensure.

Thank you

Micky Pierce, MS, ASQ CMQ/OE
Quality Director
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

*** The HCIFS is now certified to ISO 9001:2015 ****

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, June 26, 2019 6:47 AM
To: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Subject: RE: Licensure

Good morning Micky and thank you for the information. Yes I would like to still maintain my license for seized drugs. I was also planning to keep my Fellow ABC certification for Drug Analysis. ABC, as I'm sure you're aware, has similar requirements. I had previously discussed with Kay about still being proficient in Drug Chem for my certification.
And just so I'm clear on the requirements...

- 8 hours of Toxicology training courses plus 8 hours of Seized Drugs training courses every two years
- Proficiency testing for both Toxicology and Drug Chemistry every year

Is this correct?

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., F-ABC
Toxicologist III
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Sent: Tuesday, June 25, 2019 4:04 PM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Subject: Licensure

Cassie,

Now that you are in Toxicology full time, did you still plan on maintaining your forensic licensure in both the seized drugs and toxicology categories? The reason I am asking is because the Commission is establishing rules for continuing forensic education. The rules state that you will need 16 hours of discipline-specific continuing education every two years if you stick with one discipline. For multiple disciplines, you will need at least 8 hours for each discipline. You would have to proficiency test for both disciplines, too, if you went that route.
Let me know if you want to drop the drug chemistry discipline from you licensure or keep it. I'm speaking with them tomorrow about something else, so I can assist with informing them.

Micky Pierce, MS, ASQ CMQ/OE
Quality Director
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences
1861 Old Spanish Trail
Houston, Texas 77054

https://ifs.harriscountytx.gov/Pages/default.aspx

***** The HCIFS is now certified to ISO 9001:2015 *****

EXHIBIT H

Pierce, Michal (IFS)

From: Pierce, Michal (IFS)
Sent: Thursday, August 22, 2019 8:00 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS)
Subject: RE: Proficiency Tests

Technically, you don't need to be in this round, because you have already participated in a PT round this year; however, for the sake of keeping up your skills it is ideal to be tested more than once, and in the other area (processor vs. analyst). Let me discuss with Laura and Kourtni, and we will get back to you.

Thank you for bringing to my attention

Micky Pierce, MS, ASQ CMQ/OE
Quality Director
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

*** The HCIFS is now certified to ISO 9001:2015 ****

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, August 21, 2019 12:10 PM
To: Pierce, Michal (IFS) <>
Subject: FW: Proficiency Tests

Hi Good Afternoon,

I just wanted to see if I needed to be in this round of proficiency tests for Drug Chem in order to maintain my license for both Seized Drugs and Toxicology, as well as my ABC Fellow certification.

Thank you!

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., F-ABC
Toxicologist III
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Hughes, Kourtni (IFS) <>
Sent: Thursday, August 15, 2019 8:43 AM
To: (IFS) Drug Chemistry [redacted]
Subject: Proficiency Tests

I have handed out the next round of proficiency tests. To make sure everyone involved is aware, the assignments are as follows:

	PROCESSOR	ANALYST	TECH REVIEWER
1	Paige DeSantis	LaToya Binder	Kourtni Hughes
2	Brittany Disiere	LaToya Binder	Kay McClain

3	Kyle Vircks	Kay McClain	Donna Williams
4	Amber Fontanez	Jesse Zavala	Kyle Vircks
5	Claudia Garcia	Kay McClain	LaToya Binder
6	Kourtni Hughes	Michelle Del'Homme	Brittany Disiere

The tests are due to QM by October 21st, but please try and complete them as soon as you can so that they aren't put off until the last minute. Thank you!

Kourtni Hughes, M.S., F-ABC
Forensic Chemist II
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

EXHIBIT I

Pierce, Michal (IFS)

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS)
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2020 7:54 AM
To: Shaw, Laura (IFS)
Subject: RE: Proficiency Tests

Really appreciate that.

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., F-ABC
Toxicologist III
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Cook, Laura (IFS) <>
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2020 7:53 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Subject: RE: Proficiency Tests

You should be up to date now. I'll be activating a few procedures soon, so I'll add you to the list.

Thank you,

Laura Jo Cook, ASQ CQA
Senior QA/QC Project Coordinator

***** The HCIFS is now certified to ISO 9001:2015 *****

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, February 13, 2020 6:36 AM
To: Cook, Laura (IFS) <L>
Subject: RE: Proficiency Tests

Thank you Laura for reaching out. Also I have not been assigned any new SOP revisions for Drug Chem if there have been any in QPulse. I believe the last ones I got distributed were back in September.

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., F-ABC
Toxicologist III
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: Cook, Laura (IFS) <>
Sent: Wednesday, February 12, 2020 7:48 AM
To: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) [redacted]
Subject: RE: Proficiency Tests

Good Morning Cassandra,

I have reached out to Kay, so hopefully one of the tests on this round will be assigned to you.

Thank you,

Laura Jo Cook, ASQ CQA
Senior QA/QC Project Coordinator

***** The HCIFS is now certified to ISO 9001:2015 *****

From: Cavazos, Cassandra (IFS) <[redacted]
Sent: Wednesday, February 12, 2020 6:21 AM
To: Cook, Laura (IFS) <
Subject: FW: Proficiency Tests

Good morning Laura,

I was hoping you can help with more info for my situation on proficiency tests. I was wanting to see if I was going to be a part of Drug Chemistry proficiencies at some point this year? I was attempting to continue to be proficient for my TFSC license in Seized drugs and Toxicology as well as my Fellow status for my ABC certification in Drug Analysis.

Cassandra Cavazos, M.S., F-ABC
Toxicologist III
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences

From: McClain, Kay (IFS) <>
Sent: Tuesday, February 11, 2020 12:51 PM
To: (IFS) Drug Chemistry <[redacted]
Subject: RE: Proficiency Tests

The proficiency info sheets with log on information are attached to each case file now.

Kay C. McClain, B.S., F-ABC
Drug Chemistry Manager

From: McClain, Kay (IFS)
Sent: Tuesday, February 11, 2020 10:28 AM
To: (IFS) Drug Chemistry <[redacted]
Subject: Proficiency Tests

Proficiency tests have been distributed. There are 7 assigned. They are due to QM by April 20th but no need to wait that long go ahead and work them along with your normal casework. If you are unfamiliar about processing and submitting a proficiency test please read DC.QC.0019 again.

I am waiting on the paper work that goes with the PT's on login info.

Kay C. McClain, B.S., F-ABC
Drug Chemistry Manager
Harris County Institute of Forensic Sciences