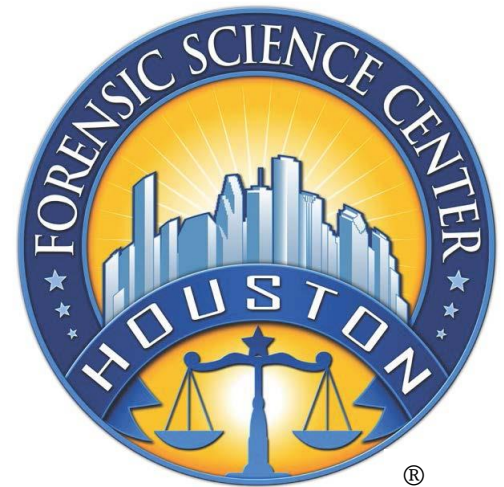


# The Recovery of Houston

Peter Stout, Ph.D., F-ABFT



# Remember in 2003

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**The New York Times**  
ON THE WEB

---

March 11, 2003

## **Worst Crime Lab in the Country Or is Houston Typical?**





By **ADAM LIPTAK**

**W**hen Josiah Sutton went on trial for rape in 1999, prosecutors in Houston had little to build a case. The victim was the only eyewitness, and her recollection was faulty. But they did have the rapist's DNA, and the Houston police crime laboratory told the jury that it was a solid match.

That was enough to persuade the jurors to convict Mr. Sutton and send him to prison for 25 years.

But new testing has conclusively demonstrated that the DNA was not Mr. Sutton's, the Houston Police Department said yesterday.

# Forensic laboratories nationally vs. HFSC

	<b>National*</b>	<b>HFSC</b>
	409 labs, 12 labs with over 100 employees	200 employees, one of the largest in the country
	Approximately 1,000,000 backlogged requests	Currently less than 4,000 in FBI/O, latent and firearms
	“Average” lab receives 9,000 requests/ year	Receives about 30,000 requests/ year
	67% of municipal labs are accredited	Fully accredited to ISO 17025 (pending)

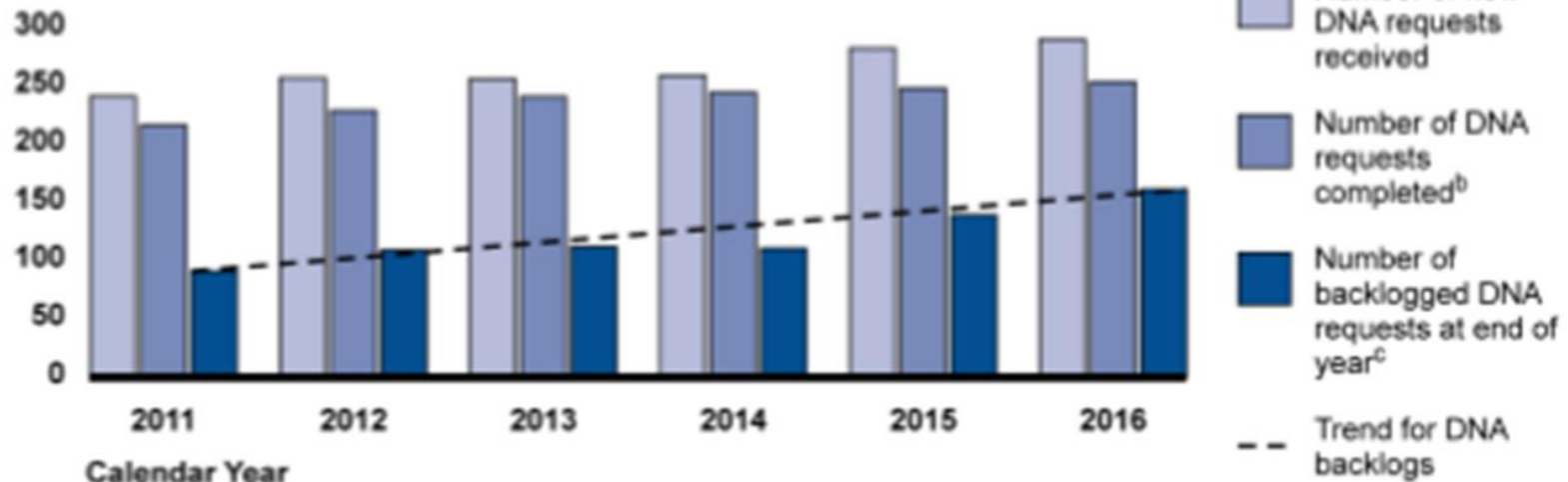
\*Census of Publicly Funded Crime Labs, November 2016

<https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=dcdetail&iid=244>

# National backlogs increasing despite \$500M federal investment

## Preliminary Observations of Levels of Crime Scene DNA Analysis among DNA Capacity Enhancement and Backlog Reduction Grant Program Grantees

DNA requests (in thousands)<sup>a</sup>



Source: GAO analysis of CEBR grant program data. | GAO-18-651T

# The cost of risk from a crime lab

## *Wrong*

**\$9M**

- George Rodriguez decision against the city. Ultimately, from a lab error.

**30,000**

- Approximate requests per year received in the lab.

**\$279B**

- Annual potential risk exposure from WRONG

## *Late*

**\$14M\***

- Estimated cost of a homicide including investigation, prosecution, lost wages social harm etc

**300**

- Approximate number of homicides in Houston annually.

**2**

- Preventing 2 homicides equals the labs annual budget

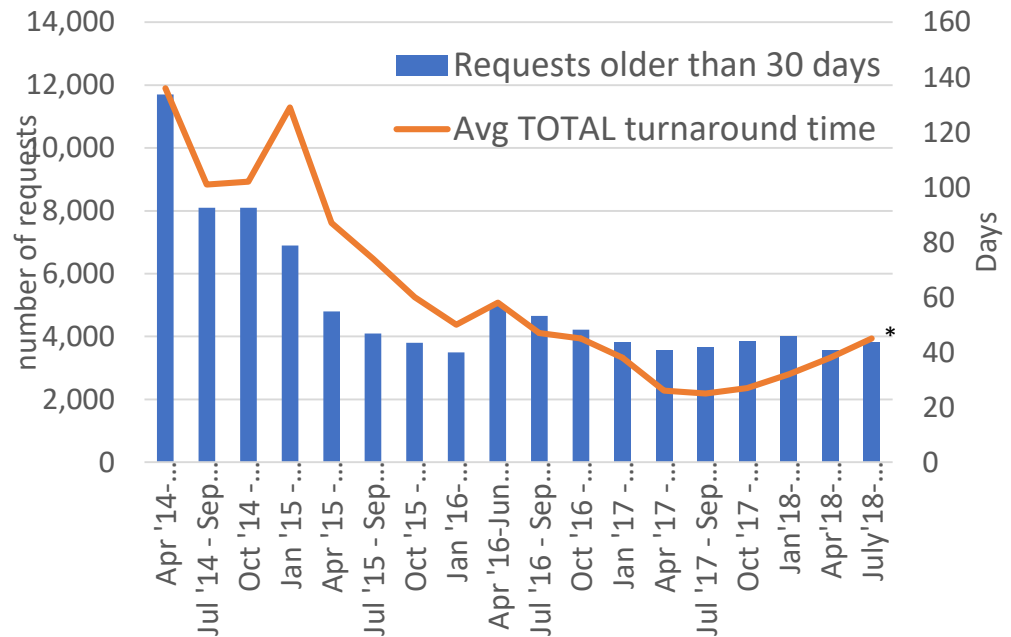
\*Murder by numbers: monetary costs imposed by a sample of homicide offenders, The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology Vol. 21, No. 4, August 2010, 501–513

# ROAD TO GOAL



# From the start of HFSC

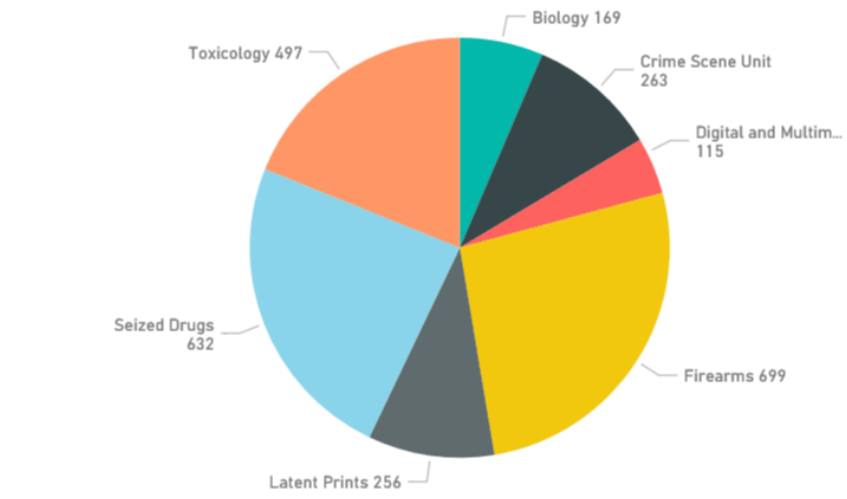
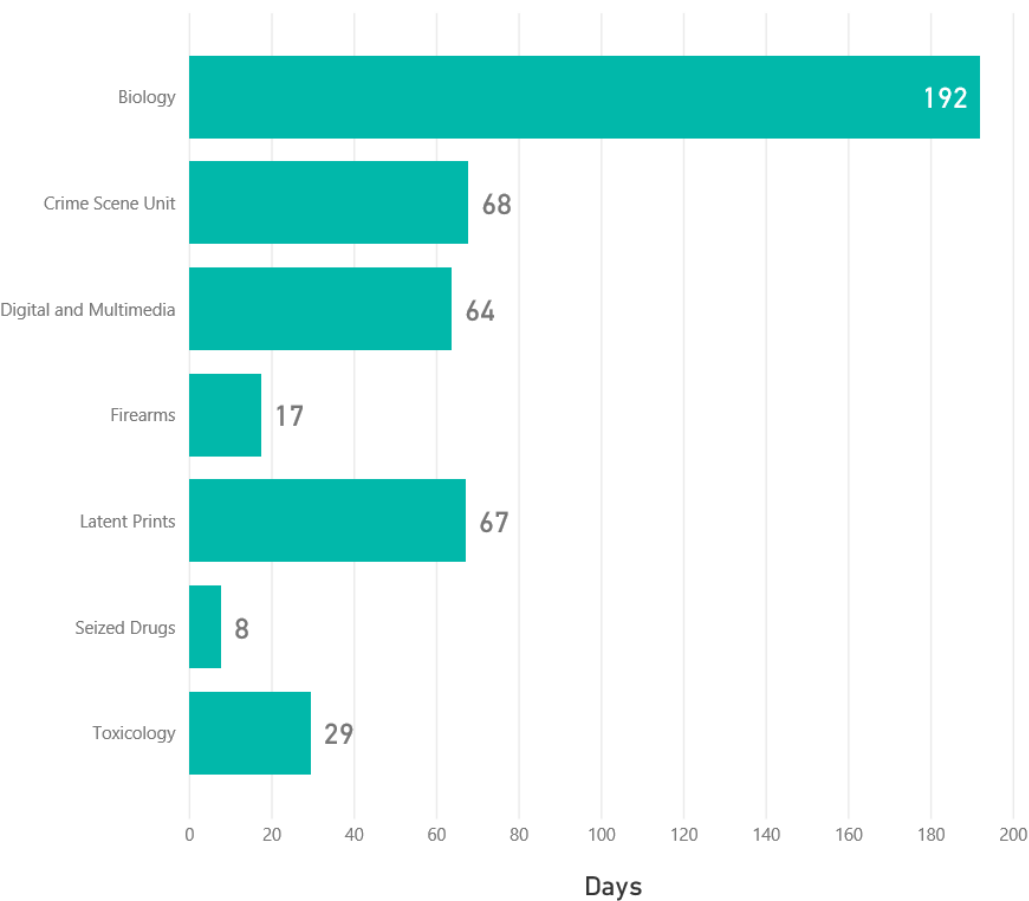
- ↓ 67%\* in Avg TOTAL turnaround (TAT) time
- ↓ 68% in backlogged requests



\* Total turnaround time calculation affected by latent print backlog, values presented with and without latent prints TAT

Requests Completed by Section

Average Turnaround Time for August 2018



<p>Turnaround Time - Days</p> <p><b>40</b></p>	<p>Month Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 01-January</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 02-February</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 03-March</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 04-April</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 05-May</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 06-June</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 07-July</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 08-August</li> </ul>	<p>Year Completed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 2014</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 2015</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 2016</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> 2017</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2018</li> </ul>
<p>Completed Requests</p> <p><b>2631</b></p>		

This data is current as of 8/31/2018.





# Challenges the lab reacts to

- Biological/DNA evidence in death penalty cases (TSC 38.43(i))
  - Lucky Ward case
  - 1,000's of items or roughly \$2M worth of testing
- Changes in national requirements
  - DNA chemistry changes mandated by FBI
  - 2 years of validation and work to implement
- Retesting drug cases
  - Retesting old cases for HCDAO to authorize HPD to destroy
  - 300+ tested so far or about \$100,000 worth of work

# HFSC's backlog: requests over 30 days old



## **Biology– 925**

316 sexual assault requests oldest is 165 days



## **Gun database – 697**

Current turnaround time is 2 days

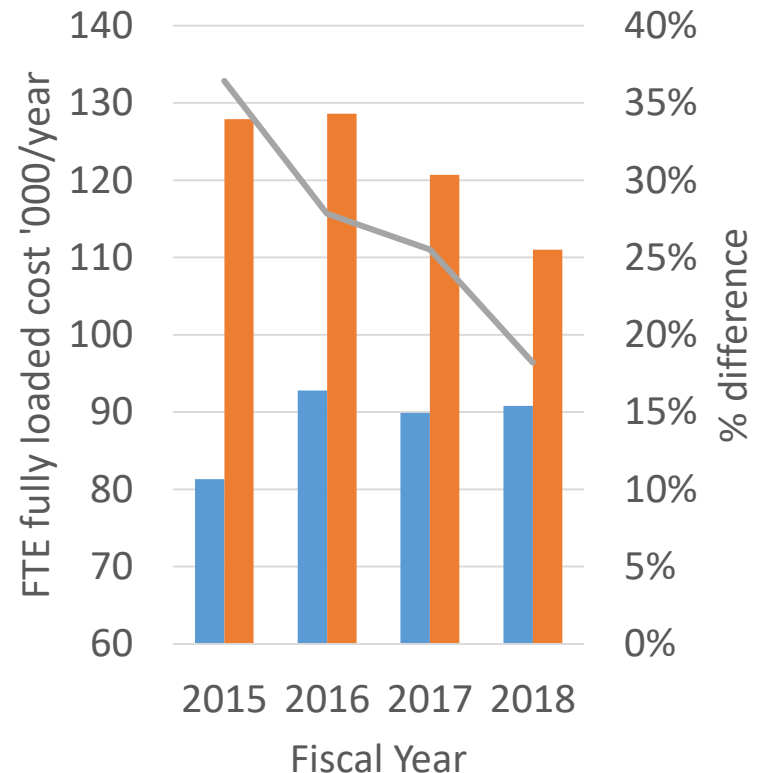


## **Latent prints – 1,349**

Violent crime against person and burglary less than 30 days

# Changes in the labor pool

- HFSC average 27% less than COH per FTE
- In April of 2014
  - 5 HFSC employees & 131 COH
- In August 2018
  - 192 HFSC
  - 16 COH/classified and civilians
- Direct wage for HFSC 10% higher than COH





# Crime Scene

Transition to Civilian  
Training

# CSU accomplishments

- ***Civilianized***

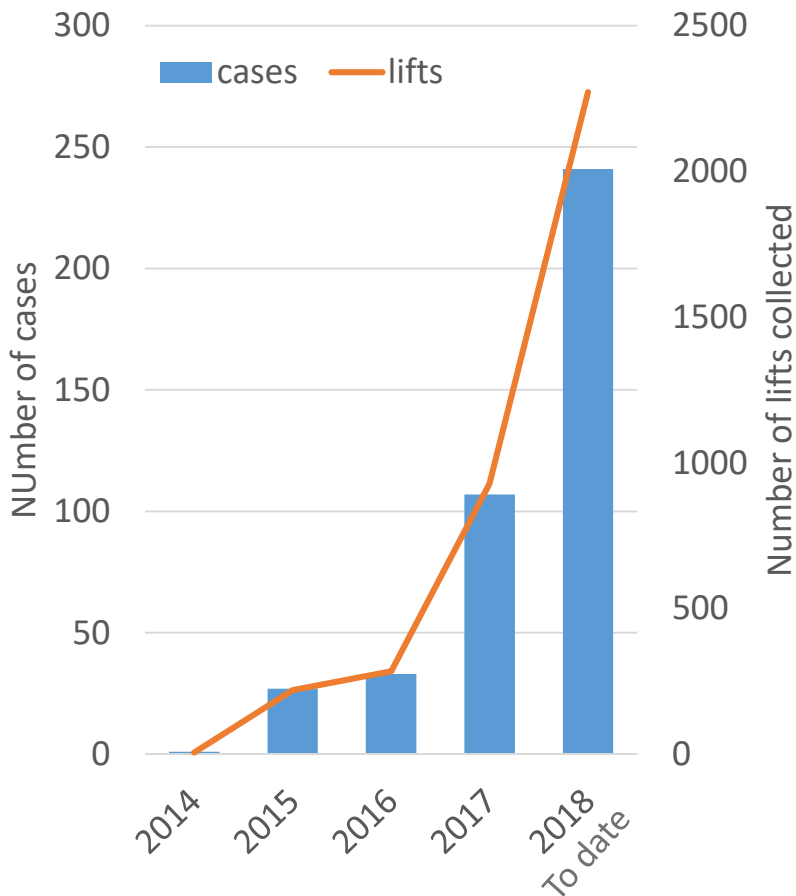
- Allowed HFSC to align with national quality trends in crime scene
- More cost effective

- ***Accredited***

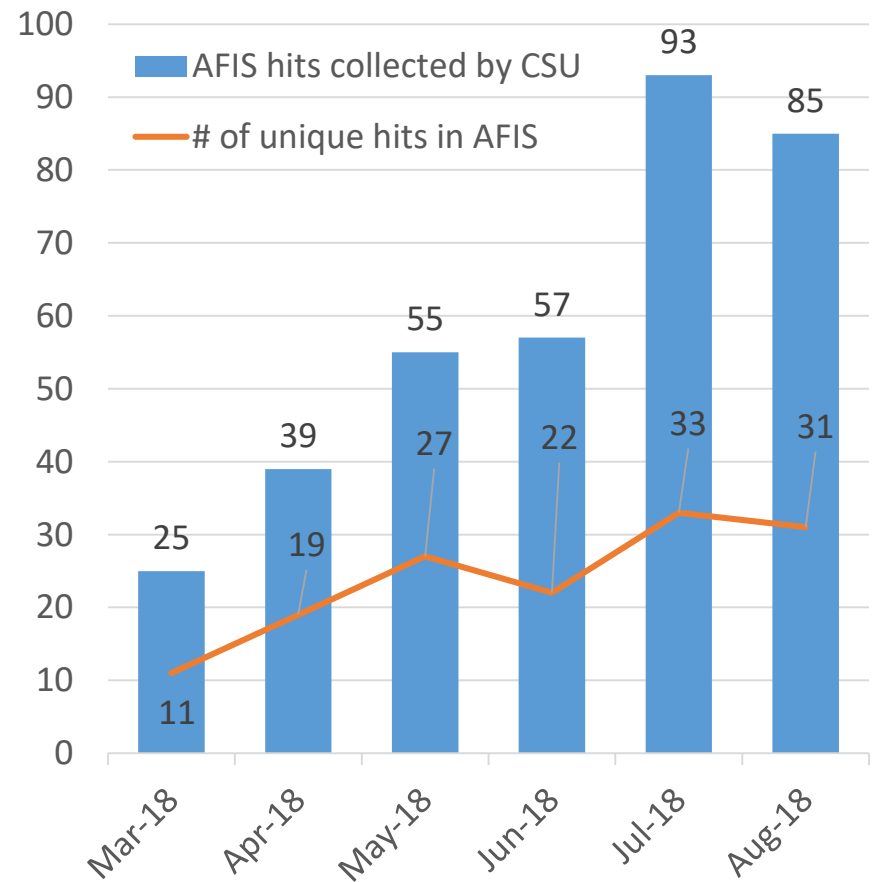
- Improved quality

# CSU: Impacts on HFSC (fingerprints)

## # of cases processed and lifts collected by CSU by year

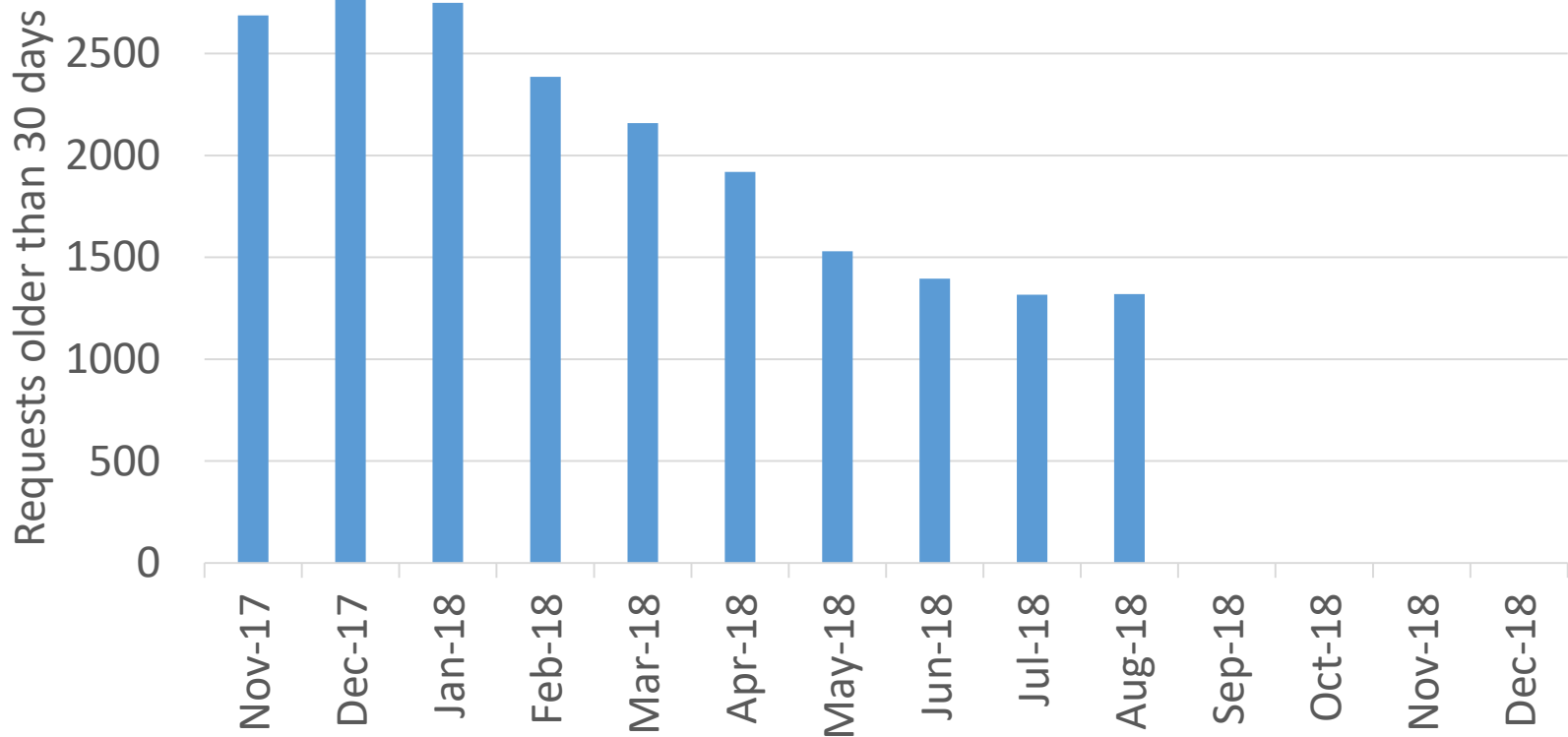


## Number leads reported to HPD in the past 6 months



# What improved CSU performance does to latent prints – saturates capacity

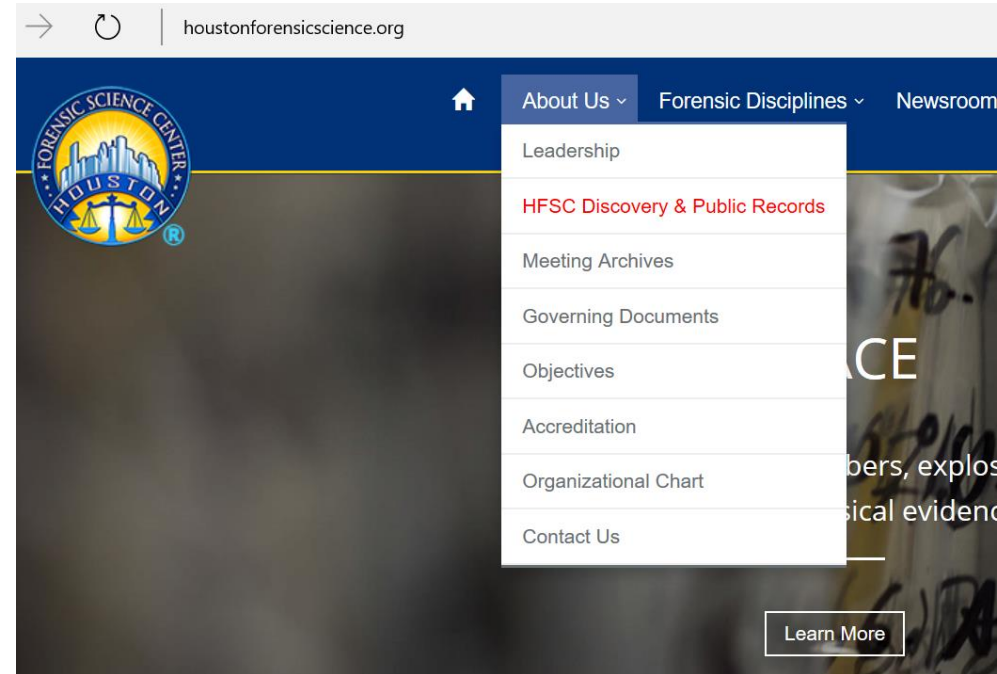
Comparison Backlog





# eDiscovery

- “Radical transparency”
  - Increased reporting
  - Increased access
  - Approximately 4,500 documents all public





# HFSC'S BLIND TESTING PROGRAM

# HFSC's blind testing program

- HFSC's quality division creates mock cases or “tests” that mimic actual work and introduce them into the workflow as all other work comes through the door
- Tests the **ENTIRE** system
- Target of 5% of the work as blind tests or about 1,000 per year

# Forensic Disciplines

Toxicology



Firearms



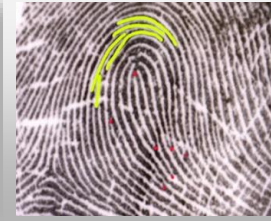
Controlled  
Substances



Biology



Latent  
Prints



Forensic  
Multimedia



Implementation Date:

**September 2015**

**December 2015**

**December 2015**

**October 2016**

**November 2017**

**November 2017**

**TRENDING**



Danny McBride: The Rolling Stone Interview



'Assassination of Gianni Versace': Sex, Lies, Fashion...



Dylan Farrow Talks Woody Allen in First TV Interview: 'I...



JANUARY 24<sup>TH</sup> — 28<sup>TH</sup> NEW YORK, NY

citi SOUND VAULT

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## Is the Opioid Epidemic Fueling Wrongful Convictions?

Crime labs are overwhelmed and under-regulated - leading to the compromise of countless drug cases nationwide

“The answer to these problems may well already exist, and in a rather surprising place: the city of Houston, Texas. "For years," says Chu, "its crime lab was notoriously the worst in the country. After millions of dollars spent to hire outside companies, the public had had enough. It's since changed its culture entirely. The laboratory is a public/private partnership funded by the city, governed by a board, and operates with complete transparency.”

