



TACIR

The Tennessee Advisory Commission
on Intergovernmental Relations

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Commission Members

FROM: Cliff Lippard
Executive Director

DATE: 18 September 2025

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 2877/House Bill 2961 (Capacity of Crime Labs in Tennessee)—
Final Report for Approval

The attached commission report is submitted for your approval. In response to concerns about the effects of evidence backlogs and turnaround times, Senate Bill 2877 by Senator Kyle and House Bill 2961 by Representative Hardaway in the 113th General Assembly requested that the commission study the feasibility of establishing a crime lab in Shelby County. The bill passed in the Senate but not in the House, and commission member Representative Williams requested in May 2024 that the commission undertake a broader study to evaluate the feasibility and need for establishing additional crime labs throughout the state, including the existing labs' capacity to process evidence efficiently and consideration of potential locations for any new crime labs to optimize resources. A draft report was presented at the June 2025 commission meeting for your review and comment.

In response to requests by members after reviewing the draft, commission staff added the following information to the report:

- Additional information about the state's digital forensics needs was added. TBI expects turnaround times to improve once all the recently added positions are filled and staff complete training, and TBI continues to assess staffing and space needs for this testing discipline.
- Examples of crime lab cost estimates, as well as a summary of the cost projections from TBI's real estate plan and the planned facilities' effects on projected need were added. Based on the real estate plan and information

provided from other sources, the planned Jackson and Knoxville lab projects combined could cost between \$44 million and \$66 million; the estimated cost of the Nashville and Chattanooga projects is unclear at this time.

- A clarification on funding for TBI's crime labs was added. TBI's labs are primarily funded by annual state appropriations, with the remainder of funds mostly coming from grants, similar to state crime labs nationwide.
- Staff provided more historical context on long-term crime trends by adding evidence request and turnaround time data from TBI dating back to fiscal year 2019-20.

One of the draft recommendations presented at the June 2025 commission meeting has since been implemented. The draft report recommended that TBI and the city of Memphis enter into an agreement for a firearms analyst in the Jackson lab dedicated to Memphis cases. Conversations among policymakers on this alternative were ongoing during the spring. Since that time, TBI and Memphis have signed an agreement to expand forensic support for criminal investigations by assigning two forensic scientists at the lab, one in DNA and one in firearms, to work solely on Memphis cases. These positions will now be funded by Memphis, and TBI plans to hire two additional scientists for the lab.

The final report's other recommendations remain unchanged. Ultimately, without confronting the constraint of limited lab space, the state's efforts to further improve forensic evidence processing and public safety will be hindered. **The commission recommends that the state increase crime lab capacity in each grand division—in line with TBI's 2024 real estate strategic plan—specifically by expanding the existing Jackson and Nashville labs, replacing the existing Knoxville lab with a larger lab with capacity for firearms testing, and adding a smaller, focused lab in Chattanooga for drug-related evidence and toxicology. Additionally, the commission recommends that expansions at the Nashville lab focus on the most overburdened disciplines—like forensic chemistry and toxicology.**

While the state undertakes long-term expansion of its facilities, there are other practices to be considered that could help reduce backlogs, expedite accurate forensic results, and improve public safety while TBI expands its labs, **the commission recommends that**

- **TBI continue to look for areas to improve efficiency using external process improvement methods;**
- **the General Assembly amend DNA testing laws to allow rapid DNA implementation at law enforcement booking stations; and**

- **the state support resource-sharing partnerships for training local law enforcement agencies across the state through funding and technical assistance.**