

TEXAS FORENSIC SCIENCE COMMISSION

FINAL REPORT ON SELF-DISCLOSURE NO.
25.68; JEFFERSON COUNTY REGIONAL CRIME
LABORATORY (CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATION;
SEIZED DRUGS; FORENSIC BIOLOGY)

APRIL 24, 2026



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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

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).

performed 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.

“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

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) (2026).

(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

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) (2026).

¹⁴ *Id.* at (b).

¹⁵ TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.01 § 4-c(e); 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.216(d) (2026).

4. Jurisdiction Applicable to the Disclosure

The disclosing crime laboratory, the Jefferson County Regional Crime Laboratory (JCRCL), 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, Tiffany Aardahl, was employed as a Forensic Biology Screening Analyst and Seized Drugs Analyst at the time of the events described in the disclosure. She has been licensed by the Commission in both the Seized Drugs and Forensic Biology Screening disciplines since the inception of the licensing program in January 2019. She was dismissed from employment at the JCRCL on October 17, 2025, and her license was placed on "inactive" status pending the resolution of this disclosure. Her Forensic Analyst licenses expired on January 31, 2026.

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

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

¹⁶ See, <https://fsc.txcourts.gov/AccreditedLabPublic#> for a list of accredited laboratories.

¹⁷ 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.304-307 (2024).

¹⁸ 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.401 (2024).

¹⁹ TEX. CODE CRIM. PROC. art. 38.01 § 4(g).

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 JCRCL filed this disclosure on October 17, 2025, alleging the Analyst had been romantically involved via messaging with a federal inmate incarcerated for trafficking methamphetamine. Additionally, she had sent money to his commissary account as well as the commissary accounts of five other inmates, one of whom was her brother. The laboratory concluded her conduct violated Jefferson County Sheriff's Office (JCSO) policy and JCRCL policy. The laboratory terminated her employment the same day they learned about the matter. The disclosure alleges her conduct constituted a conflict of interest and constituted professional misconduct.

A. Notice and Investigative Decision

FSC staff notified the analyst on January 9, 2026, of the disclosure and afforded her the opportunity to respond to the allegations. She did not respond. The Commission voted to accept the self-disclosure for investigation by Commission staff at its quarterly meeting on January 30, 2026. Ms. Aardahl was notified of the investigation on February 6, 2026, and encouraged to respond.

²⁰ *Id.* at § 11.

B. Staff Investigation

Staff reviewed the documents provided by the laboratory as well as materials obtained from the investigation conducted by the JCSO. On March 5, 2026, staff requested an interview with the analyst. On March 9, 2026, the analyst filed a written response to the disclosure.

III. COMMISSION OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

A. Background Facts

The facts of this disclosure were investigated by the JCSO and presented to the laboratory on October 17, 2025. The Analyst was terminated by the county the same day laboratory management was informed of the issue, which limited the laboratory's ability to further investigate any potential root causes. The laboratory's corrective action documentation details some personal issues in the Analyst's life, including the recent incarceration of her brother, that may have contributed to the conduct described in this report.

The JCSO supplied the Commission with the investigative materials compiled by their Internal Affairs Division which includes a witness statement, an email from the Federal Bureau of Prisons to the Jefferson County authorities alerting them of the issue, and a series of email messages sent by the Analyst to the inmate she was romantically involved with via messaging. The dates of these emails range from August 16, 2025, to October 14, 2025. According to the disclosure, the Analyst denied having met him in person. The materials also include an accounting of the commissary donations made by the Analyst to the various inmates. The dates of the donations range from June 13, 2025, to October 15, 2025 (total \$2030).²¹

The JCRCL reported there was no evidence the Analyst committed any criminal offense in connection with her communications with the inmate. The JCRCL also reported there was no

²¹ In the written response by the Analyst, she provided an email that established some of the donations were to be used for classes taught inside the jail.

evidence that any casework was affected by her decision to engage in a relationship with an inmate. The laboratory searched their records for cases involving six inmates she sent commissary money to and found no cases where the individuals were listed as a suspect.²²

B. Policy Violations

JCSO policy prohibits officers or civilian employees from knowingly commencing or maintaining a relationship with any person who is under investigation, indictment, arrest, or incarceration. The JCRCL Quality Manual requires employees to conduct themselves in a manner that does not diminish confidence in the laboratory's competence, impartiality, judgment or operational integrity. This policy extends to activities both inside and outside normal laboratory operations. The laboratory determined that the conduct of the Analyst violated these policies and terminated her employment.

C. Emails to the Inmate

Staff reviewed emails sent by the Analyst to the inmate beginning in August 2025. The first email made it clear she knew the inmate and had been receiving letters from him and that he knew her brother. The emails indicate the Analyst was romantically involved with the inmate via messaging and that she was supplying him with some money via his commissary account. At one point, the inmate apparently asked her to do something illegal, and she refused. Her email to him on that subject included the following statements:

- “You have no (expletive) clue the microscope I live under. Everything in my life, about my life, is discoverable in court!”
- “Everything I say, do and everything I write has the potential to ruin my credibility. What the hell do you think a jury would think when I am asked on the stand if I am dating a convicted drug trafficker?”

²² One 2009 case was identified where the Analyst's sibling was listed as a victim; she did not work this case.

- “Do you think any juror or judge would believe a word out of my mouth after that is on the record?”
- “Do you actually think I would have a job if my stellar reputation was (expletive) and I made the LAB, the SHERIFF, COUNTY, the ENTIRE FORENSIC COMMUNITY look bad?”

D. No 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.²³

The Analyst did not commit professional misconduct when she engaged in a romantic relationship with a federal inmate via messaging because the judgment she exercised, while undeniably poor, did not impact the forensic analysis of physical evidence as those terms are defined in the Texas Administrative Code. There was no expert examination or test performed by the Analyst on physical evidence for the purposes of determining the connection of the evidence to a criminal action implicated by the interactions between the Analyst and the inmate.

E. The Analyst Did Not Violate the Texas Administrative Code (Code of Professional Responsibility for Forensic Analysts and Crime Laboratory Management).

As noted earlier, the JCSO and the JCRCL both determined their policies were violated based on the Analyst’s decision to initiate a relationship with an incarcerated person as evidenced by the communications between them.

In contrast to the general prohibition against relationships with incarcerated individuals set forth in JCSO and JCRCL policies, the Code of Professional Responsibility prohibition against

²³ 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.302(7) (2020).

conflicts is limited to particular cases. The most applicable Code provision to the facts of this disclosure provides that each analyst shall “[a]void participation *in any case* where there are personal, financial, employment-related or other conflicts of interest”.²⁴ No “case” has been identified where the Analyst had an undisclosed conflict. None of the inmates with whom she communicated were defendants in any case pending in the laboratory from which she failed to recuse herself. The laboratory reported that no casework was affected by the Analyst’s communications or actions.

The Analyst was clear in her communications with the inmate that she knew her actions may generate impeachment material that could affect her credibility as an expert witness. She made the voluntary choice to engage in a personal relationship with an inmate, expressly against her agency’s policy. In so doing, she accepted the consequences of her decision which led to disciplinary action by her employer. Prosecutors have been made aware of the facts of this disclosure which will enable them to provide legal notice as appropriate under the law.

IV. CORRECTIVE ACTION

The laboratory undertook a review of the seized drugs cases worked by the Analyst for the six months preceding her termination from the laboratory (estimated 139 cases). These cases were reviewed and retested primarily by a third-party laboratory (NMS). The six cases that were in progress at the time of the Analyst’s termination were assigned to another analyst. For all cases, results from the reanalysis were consistent with the original analysis.²⁵ The laboratory discovered nothing in the original analysis of the cases or the reanalysis that would suggest any wrongdoing on the part of the Analyst.

²⁴ 37 Tex. Admin. Code § 651.219 (b) (5) (2026).

²⁵ One case appeared to have a clerical mistake, and there were some (expected) minor weight discrepancies between the original analysis and the reanalysis.