



AMERICAN STATISTICAL ASSOCIATION

Promoting the Practice and Profession of Statistics®

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June 25, 2024

Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, Chair
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Sen. Jerry Moran, Ranking Member
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee
Senate Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20510

Rep. Hal Rogers, Chair
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Matt Cartwright, Ranking Member
Commerce, Justice, Science Subcommittee
House Appropriations Committee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Shaheen and Rogers and Ranking Members Moran and Cartwright,

I write to urge the continued funding of the Center for Statistics and Applications in Forensic Evidence (CSAFE), a NIST Center of Excellence that had its funding prematurely terminated at a critical juncture.

After nine years of research and development, CSAFE is on the cusp of transferring products to the forensic science community to strengthen their ability to solve crimes more accurately, thereby making our communities safer and our criminal justice system more effective and fairer. The early termination undercuts the years of federal investment as CSAFE is beginning to realize its goals. In addition, it defunds dozens of undergraduate and graduate students and stalls CSAFE's extensive training and professional development work.

To elaborate on the scope of CSAFE's work, the research program entails 28 active projects involving more than 80 multidisciplinary researchers at 11 institutions and more than 40 graduate and undergraduate students. Their researchers have published more than 100 articles in peer-reviewed journals, and their major accomplishments include a scientific basis for analyzing firearms, cartridges, handwriting, shoeprints, and digital evidence. They bring their research to practitioners by testing and validating CSAFE tools with such entities as the US Secret Service, Houston Forensic Science Center, Kentucky State Police Central Forensic Laboratory, Miami-Dade Forensic Services Division, and US Army Criminal Investigation Laboratory.

CSAFE's education, training, and engagement is also extensive. More than 11,000 people have enrolled in CSAFE's more than 100 webinars, workshops, educational courses, and exhibits.

Further, with the Innocence Project, CSAFE established the Scientific Literacy Project to provide free, online basic scientific training for public defenders. The project, for example, just announced a partnership with the North Carolina Indigent Defense Services, enrolling dozens of attorneys for the program.

Besides defunding the many research projects along with researchers and students, the cut also terminates the application of research to forensic practice that, of course, is the goal of CSAFE and has been building momentum. Prompted by reports from the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology and the National Academies, courts have restricted the testimony examiners can offer. Recently, firearms testimony has been limited or excluded in state courts in Illinois and Maryland due to uncertainty in the error rates of subjective visual examinations.

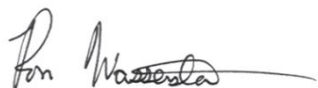
CSAFE has developed algorithms that mimic examiner visual assessment in a reproducible, quantitative, and statistically validated way. The firearms algorithm has been tested and produced very low error rates. The firearm algorithm and others currently under development are ready to be transitioned to lab use, with open-source code and web tools designed for case work. Without continued funding, we risk courts excluding current methods with no replacement available to ensure firearms evidence can still be used reliably.

CSAFE researchers actively support the development of forensic standards through participation in the NIST Organization of Scientific Area Committees, which updates and develops forensic science standards for US laboratories. Without the needed advancements in statistics as applied to these forensic disciplines, the standards risk stagnating or falling behind. Continued CSAFE funding ensures these researchers continue working on forensics problems and updating the standards for forensics to include ongoing developments in the field.

We understand the difficult funding environment, yet still submit that the federal government's relatively modest investment in CSAFE should be a priority—especially at this key stage—to support our criminal justice system becoming fairer and more efficient.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ron Wasserstein", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ron Wasserstein
ASA Executive Director