

DOJ reports crime labs improved DNA processing times, got worse in other areas

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State crime labs took less time in 2022 to process DNA evidence even as more samples have been submitted, but did worse in other areas compared to the year before, according to a new report.

The Department of Justice on Thursday published its annual report showing average evidence processing turnaround times, how many pieces of evidence the state's three crime labs take in and how many they are able to return. It shows turnaround times for DNA evidence dropped to 84 days on average from 128 days in 2021.

The labs also returned more DNA evidence overall, processing 3,715 samples compared to 3,526 in 2021. The labs also took in 4,347 pieces of DNA evidence compared to the 3,612 pieces they took in 2021.

Dem AG Josh Kaul praised the labs for continuing "to advance Wisconsin DOJ's mission of protecting the public and ensuring that justice is done."

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Fond du Lac County DA Eric Toney, Kaul's GOP challenger last fall and president of the Wisconsin DA's Association, told WisPolitics nothing has really changed about the crime labs' performance since last year, when he sought to make it a campaign issue.

Toney added he stands by his past criticism that the state's labs are testing fewer items under Kaul overall than they did when GOP AG Brad Schimel was in office.

Toney joined Kaul in June at a joint press conference at the Risser Justice Center to

ask the JFC for more crime lab positions, arguing the labs are critical to Wisconsin's criminal justice system.

Kaul sought 10 new DNA testing employees, but JFC did not approve any. The budget committee only approved three new positions related to DOJ's crime labs, all for toxicology.

A DOJ spokesperson told WisPolitics federal pandemic relief funds helped boost the DNA testing numbers by covering overtime costs, adding without the American Rescue Plan Act funds the labs would've performed worse.

The labs performed worse than in 2021 in most areas besides DNA, such as testing controlled substances, toxicology reports and firearm testing.

The labs processed and returned just 2,439 pieces of toxicology evidence compared to the 4,078 in 2021. Toxicologists test evidence such as bodily fluids or other pieces of the human body for alcohol and controlled substances. The average turnaround time also nearly doubled to 84 days from 48 days.

Kaul has argued toxicology testing has only gotten more complicated as illegal drug manufacturers invent new versions of existing drugs by only slightly changing the chemical makeup.

Firearm processing numbers also worsened with labs returning 382 pieces of evidence in 2022, less than the 399 returned in 2021. Turnaround time also grew to 167 days from 157.

The Office of Crime Scene Response did see a slight improvement though as it decreased average response time to 27.3 hours from 32.9 in 2021. But the unit also responded to just 101 requests, fewer than the 155 in 2021.

See the DOJ release and report [here](#).