

KBI Forensic Science Laboratory

The new forensic science laboratory was approved during the 2013 session in SB 171, and was made possible through collaboration between the Kansas Bureau of Investigation, Washburn University, City of Topeka Public Building Commission, and the Department of Administration. Construction of the new KBI Forensic Science Laboratory began on the campus of Washburn University on April 30th, 2014 with the ceremonial groundbreaking. The KBI laboratory will occupy approximately 88,000 square feet, with an additional 12,000 square feet of shared space with Washburn University, the remainder of the building houses the mechanical systems. The laboratory is currently scheduled to be completed, on time and within budget, in October 2015.

Regarding the financing of the laboratory, the Topeka Public Building Commission issued \$55.0 million in bonds to finance the construction. The bonds were financed for 20 years at 3.77 percent. As of February 2015, \$27.5 million has been spent. The debt service principal and interest payments are reflected in the KBI's budget and are anticipated to be approximately \$4.3 million in FY 2016 and FY 2017. The operational costs for the facility are estimated to be \$882,000 in each of these fiscal years.

A total of 62 current employees, and an additional 12 new positions consisting of forensic scientists and support personnel, plan to begin work in the new laboratory in the fall of 2015. The KBI calculated that it costs over \$190,000 to train each new forensic scientist. During the 2014 Legislative Session, the Legislature approved a 10.0 percent base pay increase for forensic scientists in an attempt to improve retention rates. The KBI believes that the salary increase, new lab, and collaboration with Washburn will assist the agency in recruiting and retaining qualified scientists. The additional scientists will help the agency address the current backlog of cases and improve the timelines of service to its customers. KBI anticipates that the newly hired scientists will complete their initial training within 2 years of hire and become capable of independent casework by 2018. By 2035, the KBI projects that the lab will house 108 employees.

The move to the new laboratory will allow the KBI greater efficiency and better use of technology. The new laboratory and staffing increase will better enable the KBI to prioritize cases related to homicides, death investigations, and major crimes against persons, such as sexual assaults. Cases which are subpoena driven and required for court will continue to be prioritized. In FY 2016 and FY 2017, the laboratory anticipates a reduction of backlogged cases in DNA and toxicology sections. The agency will continue to work towards its goal of an average turnaround time of no more than 60 days on forensic analysis requests.

The KBI forensic science laboratory is, and will continue to be nationally accredited by the American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors / Laboratory Accreditation Board. Accreditation mandates that each KBI scientist pass an external proficiency test each year as part of ASCLD/LAB's quality assurance review. As court-qualified experts, scientists are also required to receive ongoing training, demonstrate their expert qualifications and their professional standing as an expert in their particular field.