



NATIONAL COMMISSION ON FORENSIC SCIENCE

NIST
National Institute of
Standards and Technology
U.S. Department of Commerce

Abstract

Proposed Topic

Uniform Policy and Procedures for Accreditation Programs

Sponsoring Subcommittee

Accreditation and Proficiency Testing

Type of Work Product Proposed

Views Document and Recommendations

Statement of the Issue

The Commission has recommended that all FSSPs seek and obtain accreditation from accrediting bodies that submit to and are in compliance with ISO/IEC 17011 and are signatories to the ILAC MRA. The Commission noted a number of challenges to reaching the goal of universal accreditation – the presence of accrediting bodies that do not use ISO/IEC standards; the existence of accrediting bodies that are not recognized by ILAC; limits on the scope of existing accreditation programs; and limits on the availability of assessors, subject matter experts, and parent agency resources/funding – but has not examined these challenges and their impact on the current system of accreditation. The Accreditation and Proficiency Testing Subcommittee of the National Commission on Forensic Science will evaluate recommendations for the creation of forensic-specific accreditation requirements to supplement current accreditation programs offered through International Laboratory Accreditation Cooperation (ILAC) Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) signatory accreditation bodies to ISO/IEC 17025, ISO/IEC 17020, and ISO 15189.

Background

The work product of FSSP's has a significant impact to the health and well-being of the general population as it is often used to make liberty decisions and even life and death decisions by fact finders in the criminal justice system. Many industries with a similar impact on the general public are regulated (e.g. transportation, food, drugs). There is no universal regulatory oversight over FSSPs¹ or the accrediting programs but due to the impact on public safety, standardized industry-specific requirements should be part of FSSP accreditation programs. In the absence of industry specific regulation and in light of the challenges noted above, the current system of accreditation should be examined for possible improvements through forensic specific requirements for the process of accreditation and for enforcement of standards.

Some areas the subcommittee will examine for recommendations include:

- Requirements related to the frequency of on-site ILAC MRA signatory accreditation

¹ A few jurisdictions have oversight schemes that vary in content and applicability.

body assessments (While on-site assessment is required by ISO/IEC 17011 at least every 24 months, current accreditation body program cycles range from 2-4 years)

- Requirements that standards approved by the OSAC for addition to the OSAC Registry of Standards be implemented by accredited FSSPs (and that the requirement be enforced by that FSSP's accrediting body)
- Requirement(s) related to participation in proficiency testing programs
- Requirements related to the make-up and expertise of assessment teams
- Requirements related to the conduct of on-site assessments
- Requirements related to transparency of the accreditation process

The Subcommittee will examine the current system of accreditation to determine whether there are avenues for improvement that might be impacted by a views document or recommendations from the Commission.