




Office of the Deputy Attorney General  
Washington, D.C. 20530

January 18, 2018

MEMORANDUM FOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENT COMPONENTS

FROM: THE DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL 

SUBJECT: Approval of Uniform Language for Testimony and Reports for the Latent Print Discipline and Testimony Monitoring Framework

The Department of Justice has taken unprecedented steps to strengthen the reliability of forensic science and to enhance the courtroom presentation of forensic evidence. We are committed to a continuous process of improving forensic practice because the availability of accurate and reliable forensic evidence is critically important to both convict the guilty and exonerate the innocent. The Attorney General has made it a top priority of the Department to reduce violent crime and improve public safety. The effective and proper use of forensic science advances that goal.

Like all applied sciences, the practice of forensic science relies on human interpretation and judgment. One key aspect of reliable forensic practice is to understand and appropriately convey the limitations of the evidence. In August 2017, I announced that the Department would develop Uniform Language for Testimony and Reports (ULTR) to set the appropriate scientific boundaries for expert conclusions offered by Department examiners in lab reports and testimony. I also announced that we would develop and implement a process to continually monitor the accuracy of courtroom testimony provided by Department examiners. Today I am pleased to announce approval of the ULTR for the latent print discipline (Latent Print ULTR). I am also pleased to announce approval of Department guidance to our forensic laboratories and digital analysis entities for establishing a testimony monitoring policy.

The Latent Print ULTR is the first ULTR to be approved. It reflects the range of appropriate conclusions that Department examiners may provide in reports and testimony. It also sets forth important scientific limitations on those conclusions and other testimonial assertions. As forensic practice shifts in response to advancements in scientific knowledge, so too will appropriate language. The Department supports research and practitioner-led efforts to develop scientifically sound consensus standards. Approved ULTR documents will be reviewed at least annually to ensure they continue to reflect sound scientific principles and current forensic standards and practices.

