



Timeliness of State Crime Laboratories in Analyzing Evidence

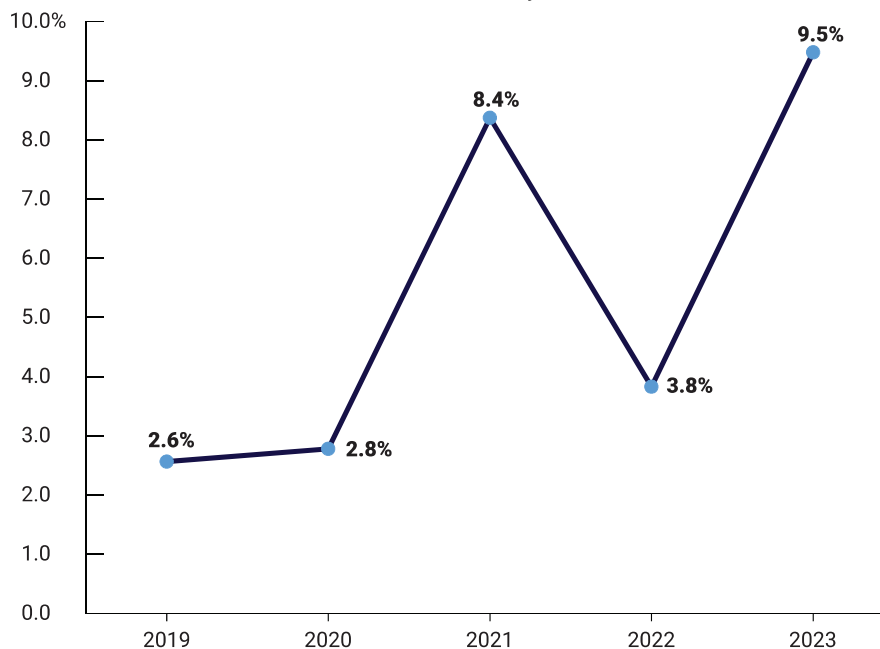
Department of Justice

The Department of Justice (DOJ) operates three crime laboratories, which are located in Madison, Milwaukee, and Wausau. Statutes require the crime laboratories to analyze evidence involved with investigating and prosecuting crimes if they are requested to do so by statutorily authorized individuals such as the Attorney General, district attorneys, and sheriffs and police chiefs. In fiscal year (FY) 2022-23, DOJ spent \$30.4 million on the crime laboratories.

The vacancy rate of crime laboratory analyst positions increased from 2.6 percent in July 2019 to 9.5 percent in July 2023

DOJ was authorized an additional 10.4 full-time equivalent (FTE) permanent positions for its crime laboratories from the 2019-2021 biennium through the 2023-2025 biennium. In July 2023, DOJ was authorized a total of 177.1 FTE permanent positions for its crime laboratories, including 105.5 FTE positions for analysts, most of whom examine evidence. On June 30, 2023, analysts had an average tenure of 12.5 years.

Vacancy Rates of Authorized FTE Permanent Analyst Positions at DOJ's State Crime Laboratories¹
As of July 1



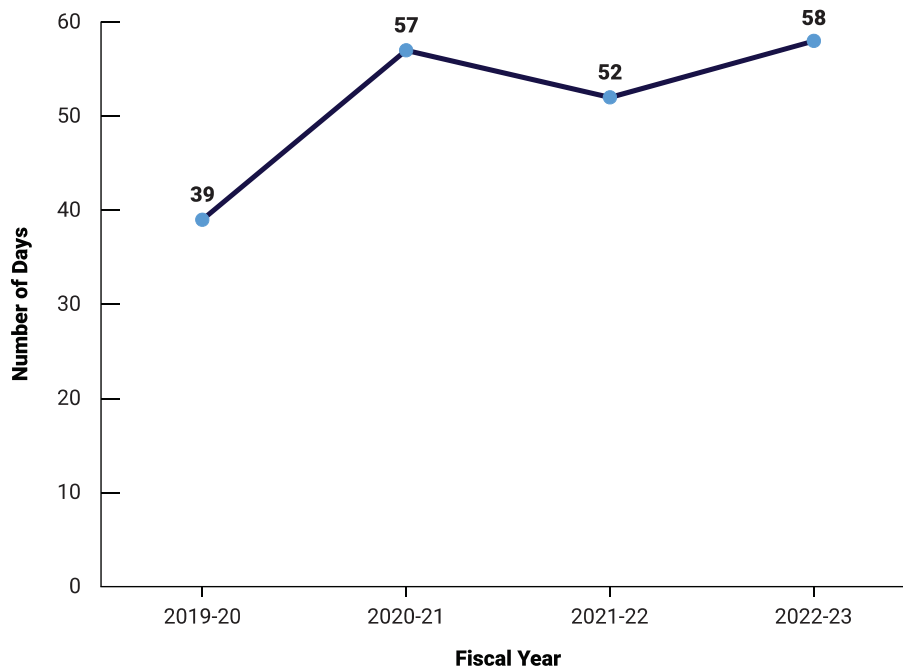
¹ According to the State's payroll system.

The median turnaround time for analyzing evidence increased from 39 days for assignments created in FY 2019-20 to 58 days for assignments created in FY 2022-23

A crime laboratory creates one or more assignments for each item of evidence submitted to it. From FY 2019-20 through FY 2022-23, the number of assignments decreased by 13.2 percent.

DOJ defines turnaround time as the number of calendar days from creation of an assignment to completion of an administrative review. DOJ indicated it strives to complete assignments in as timely a manner as possible, but it must analyze evidence accurately.

Median Turnaround Time for DOJ's State Crime Laboratories to Analyze Evidence, by Fiscal Year That Assignments Were Created¹



¹ Includes assignments completed as of November 2023.

From FY 2019-20 through FY 2022-23, the median turnaround time to complete assignments created in a given fiscal year increased by 48.7 percent. We calculated an overall median turnaround time for all units, in part, because DOJ indicated its goal is to have an overall median turnaround time of 60 days.

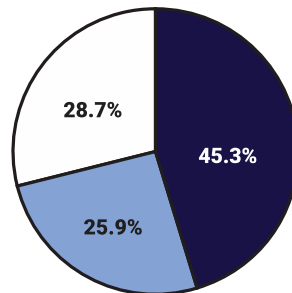
2023 Wisconsin Act 58, which takes effect in July 2024, requires sexual assault kits to be processed within six months, or within 60 days if a victim reports a sexual assault to a law enforcement agency, the perpetrator's identity is unknown, and a public safety threat exists. We recommend DOJ ensure the kits are processed within the deadlines required by Act 58.

Approximately one-half of survey respondents were satisfied with the timeliness of DOJ's crime laboratories in analyzing evidence

In January 2024, we surveyed 72 sheriffs, 420 police chiefs, 71 district attorneys, 259 circuit court judges, 358 public defenders, and 63 medical examiners and coroners. A total of 45.3 percent of survey responses indicated satisfaction with the timeliness of crime laboratory units in analyzing evidence in 2023, and 25.9 percent indicated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

Stakeholder Opinions: Satisfaction with the Timeliness of DOJ's State Crime Laboratory Units in Analyzing Evidence in 2023¹

■ Satisfied ■ Neither Satisfied
nor Dissatisfied □ Dissatisfied



¹According to 49 sheriffs, 189 police chiefs, 28 district attorneys, 92 circuit court judges, 48 public defenders, and 6 medical examiners and coroners who responded to our January 2024 survey.

DOJ should take additional actions to improve the timeliness of its crime laboratories in analyzing evidence

DOJ should improve productivity standards for senior and advanced analysts, including by formally establishing written policies for the standards and tracking the extent to which the analysts in a given unit met the standards.

DOJ should improve how its crime laboratories centrally record information, including by developing comprehensive written policies that define how crime laboratories record in its laboratory information management system the priority level of assignments.

DOJ should improve its annual reports on the crime laboratories, including by adopting a standardized measure of turnaround time when comparing the timeliness of the crime laboratories to other laboratories.

We make 16 recommendations to DOJ for improvements

Please see the complete list of our recommendations on our website.