

Pennsylvania State Police Written Testimony
Senate Communications and Technology Committee
and Senate State Government Committee

February 7, 2024



Good afternoon, Chairwoman Pennycuick, Chairman Dillon, Chairman Dush, Chairwoman Cappelletti, and members of the Senate Communications and Technology and State Government committees. The Pennsylvania State Police (PSP) appreciates the opportunity to offer written testimony on the impact of the recent data loss incident and the efforts to recover from it.

The PSP Bureau of Forensic Services (BFS) is composed of six regional laboratories and one DNA laboratory. The laboratories are strategically located across the state encompassing 10 forensic disciplines. The laboratories serve all PSP stations, District Liquor Enforcement and Gaming offices, approximately 900 municipal police departments, and as requested, federal agencies. In 2023, the laboratories completed analyses for 37,382 cases. All laboratories are accredited by the American National Standards Institute and must adhere to the stringent policies and standards of the National Accreditation Board to retain that accreditation.

The PSP BFS utilizes two applications to manage evidence submissions and assist law enforcement agencies. The first application is "Prelog," a secure website used by law enforcement agencies to submit evidence to PSP laboratories as well as two other forensic laboratories, Allegheny County Office of the Medical Examiner and Cumberland County. The second application is the "BEAST," a Laboratory Information Management System used by PSP laboratories to manage case information, track records, and generate laboratory and statistical reports. Philadelphia, Allegheny County and Cumberland County all maintain their own BEAST laboratory management systems.

On January 3, 2024, PSP learned that the PSP BEAST and Prelog applications unexpectedly went offline. An email notification of the outage was received by BFS personnel. Subsequent automated notifications provided information about deletion of multiple servers. Due to the loss of application functionality, all appointments for evidence drop-offs and evidence transfers between laboratories were cancelled with limited exceptions for urgent circumstances from January 4 to January 12, 2024. Laboratory personnel resorted to paper evidence submission forms and paper chain of custody forms to maintain critical operations.

On January 7, 2024, it was determined that the BEAST and Prelog backups maintained by the Office of Administration were unusable in the restoration efforts.

When BFS was informed of the data loss and the complications encountered in the recovery effort, laboratory staff began identifying sources of backup data and redundant systems within their control. While multiple years of data were initially impacted, to date nearly all of the data has been able to be restored and functional as of Friday January 12, 2024. Both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Accreditation Board were notified and briefed on the incident to ensure compliance with Criminal Justice Information Services (CJIS) requirements and accreditation standards.

On January 12, 2024, the BEAST was brought back online with limited functionality for use within the laboratory, and on January 15, 2024, labs began accepting evidence submissions. PSP provided notification to law enforcement partners advising them of the

continued inaccessibility of Prelog and providing additional instructions related to the temporary alternative process for submitting evidence and inquiring about case status. While Prelog is being reconstructed, a temporary workaround manual process has been implemented to allow submission of evidence to PSP laboratories until the Prelog application is fully restored.

All physical evidence in possession of the BFS remains secure and was never compromised. The data loss affecting Prelog and the BEAST has resulted in the following impacts to the laboratories:

- Evidence submitted to the laboratories between June 15, 2023, and January 3, 2024, will need to have certain data manually re-entered into the BEAST, as well as evidence already submitted to the lab but not yet fully processed prior to June 15, 2023. This data re-entry required the development of detailed instructions and tutorials for staff to ensure the appropriate source of data was utilized to repopulate or verify data fields for each case. It should be noted, only authorized laboratory personnel are qualified to perform this data restoration due to accreditation standards and confidentiality requirements.
- To date, Prelog is unavailable for law enforcement to enter case information for pending submissions and retrieve reports. PSP has requested law enforcement prioritize evidence submissions until the Prelog application becomes functional, anticipated later this week.

As a result of this incident, a criminal investigation was initiated by the PSP Bureau of Criminal Investigation into the circumstances of this event as required by CJIS regulations. The results of that investigation are pending. In addition to the criminal investigation, a root cause analysis is required to maintain laboratory accreditation. We anticipate this analysis being initiated once critical recovery tasks are complete.

The BFS has a staff of over 200 forensic professionals diligently working to restore the full capacity and capabilities of our crime laboratories. PSP is committed to working through its phased recovery plan in order to best serve the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our perspective on this important topic.