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March 3, 2014

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller IV
Chair, Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Rockefeller,

Thank you for your leadership on forensic science reform through hearings and your recently reintroduced S. 2022, “The Forensic Science and Standards Act of 2014.” Three important dimensions of forensic science reform are a strong research agenda, standards development, and standards adaptation and implementation. S. 2022 addresses these components well, especially with the initial guidance from a National Academies panel and continued guidance through the Forensic Science Advisory Committee (FSAC), which has already been implemented through the establishment of the National Commission on Forensic Science.

The American Statistical Association (ASA) supports the goals of your bill and your efforts to support research and the development of standards for the forensic sciences. We are especially pleased with your leadership in the introduction of a forensic science reform bill because, as chair of the Senate committee with science jurisdiction, you can ensure the science aspects of forensic science reform are appropriately addressed across the federal government.

The bill recognizes the importance of including the broad stakeholder community. We especially want to recommend that scientists from relevant scientific disciplines (including statistics, physics, chemistry, and biology) be involved in all aspects of the reform effort to avoid the insularity that has existed in some forensic science disciplines (e.g., firearm and toolmark identification, identification of human bite marks).

We appreciate the explicit inclusion of statisticians on the FSAC. As the ASA Board statement on forensic science states, “Statisticians are vital to establishing measurement protocols, quantifying uncertainty, designing experiments for testing new protocols or methodologies, and analyzing data from such experiments.” (http://www.amstat.org/outreach/pdfs/Forensic_Science_Endorsement.pdf)

We look forward to working with you and your staff going forward on this bill and on forensic science reform more broadly. Thank you again for your leadership on forensic science reform. We hope you and your committee will continue applying whatever pressure you can to improve the science in forensic science.

Sincerely,

David Morganstein
2015 President, American Statistical Association