Washington State Patrol

Toxicology Laboratory Backlog Reduction Report

JULY 1, 2026

Pursuant to ESSB 5161, Section 207(15)

Executive Summary

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5161, Section 207(15), provided the Washington State Patrol (WSP) with $3,000,000 in one-time funding, exclusively for hiring additional staff and purchasing equipment for the Toxicology Laboratory, with the specific goal of reducing DUI processing backlogs. The expectation is that these resources will measurably decrease case processing times. The provision also requires WSP to report semi-annually, beginning December 1, on activities undertaken and planned with the funding provided, as well as current DUI processing times compared to those in June 2025.

In the 2026 Supplemental Session, the proviso was modified to expand the scope of allowable activities to support utilization of proven backlog and turnaround time reduction strategies. In addition, $1,400,000 was reappropriated in the 2027-29 biennium to sustain backlog reduction activities beyond the current biennium.

As of March 2026, the total backlog has been reduced by approximately 8% (-1,366) cases since August 2025 (peak), and further reductions are anticipated in FY27 and beyond.

To make the most of this legislative investment and achieve lasting improvements in case turnaround times, securing ongoing permanent funding for positions funded through this proviso is essential to maintain laboratory capacity and prevent future backlogs.

Funding Plan

With this one-time funding, the laboratory is creating a small, high-throughput blood alcohol section within the constraints of the current facilities. The available laboratory space has a limited footprint for new equipment and instrumentation and can accommodate a total of three (3) FTEs, to include two (2) Forensic Scientists and one (1) Property and Evidence Custodian. Once operational, the section will be dedicated exclusively to blood alcohol analysis for impaired driving casework.

The reappropriation of a portion of the funding to the 2027-29 biennium will enable the laboratory to maintain the high-throughput blood alcohol section and FTEs through FY29.

Further, as a result of the broadening of the proviso language in the 2026 Supplemental Session, WSP will integrate additional backlog and turnaround time reduction strategies into the overall funding plan to maximize the return on this investment:

Overtime Activities ($6,000 - $8,000 monthly)

- Overtime support will enable the laboratory to maintain capacity while new staff complete in-training programs.
- Monthly overtime efforts support the testing of 250-300 samples and the completion of 150-200 cases monthly, directly contributing to backlog reduction.

Technology Investments ($150,000 - $200,000 one-time)

- Establishing a statewide electronic distribution system for all forensic test reports will streamline administrative processes, reducing the turnaround times by several days.
- This improvement will enhance accessibility statewide, particularly for rural jurisdictions.

Procurement of Additional Drug Testing Instrumentation ($450,000 one-time)

- Once operational, additional drug testing instrumentation will increase overall laboratory capacity.
- Installation, validation, and verification of additional instruments are expected to take approximately 12 months.Implementation and operational benefits are expected in the 2027-29 biennium.

Activities to Date

High-Throughput Blood Alcohol Section

Three (3) FTEs were established: two (2) Forensic Scientists and one (1) Property and Evidence Custodian.

- Recruitments opened in October 2025.
- The Property and Evidence Custodian was hired in January 2026.
- The two (2) Forensic Scientists were hired in February 2026 and April 2026.
    - The Forensic Scientists require approximately 6-8 months of training before they can conduct independent casework.
    - These scientists have reduced overall training timelines and are anticipated to contribute to casework faster, as their training will focus solely on alcohol analysis rather than comprehensive drug toxicology.

Scientific instrumentation and equipment were ordered in October 2025 and delivered in February 2026. This is comprised of two alcohol testing instruments (i.e., HS-GC) and associated equipment, which will be used in the newly established high-throughput blood alcohol section by the new Forensic Scientists.

Instrumentation installation, validation, and verification began in February 2026 and is expected to be completed in August 2026, aligning with when the first Forensic Scientist is anticipated to begin casework.

Overtime Activities

As of March 2026, monthly targeted overtime efforts funded through this proviso have resulted in the testing of approximately 1,300 samples and completion of 650 cases.

Technology Investments

The development of a statewide electronic distribution system has been initiated for all forensic test reports. This system is intended to streamline administrative processes and reduce the turnaround times by several days.

Backlog and Turnaround Times

Backlog[1]

Baseline Backlog (June 2025)		16,490		Current Backlog (March 2026)		15,751
2023 pending	1,150	93% of 2023 backlog eliminated		2023 pending	0	100% of 2023 backlog eliminated
2024 pending	8,873	51% of 2024 backlog eliminated		2024 pending	2,623	85% of 2024 backlog eliminated
2025 pending*	6,465	31% of 2025 backlog eliminated		2025 pending	9,350	51% of 2025 backlog eliminated

The backlog has decreased by approximately 8% (-1,366 cases) since the backlog peaked in August 2025 at 17,117 cases. The high-throughput blood alcohol section remains in the implementation phase, and further reductions are anticipated in the second fiscal year (FY27).

*Note: The June 2025 baseline only includes cases received through June 30, 2025, whereas the March 2026 figures include all pending 2025 cases. Therefore, the 2025 pending case counts are not directly comparable.

Quarterly Turnaround Times

Baseline Turnaround Times (Q2 2025)			Current Turnaround Times (Q1 2026)		
Case Type[2]	Median (days)	Median (months)	Case Type	Median (days)	Median (months)
DUI - volatiles	347	11	DUI - volatiles	302	10
DUI	663	22	DUI	663	22
DRE	665	22	DRE	679	22

Median turnaround times for DUI-volatiles cases have decreased by 45 days as permanently funded FTEs complete training milestones. Median turnaround times for DUI and DRE cases are consistent with baseline, as current strategies identified above remain in the implementation phase. Reductions are anticipated in the second fiscal year (FY27).

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[1] Pending case: any case received by lab but no final report issued/testing is pending

[2] Case type definitions:

DUI Volatiles: impaired driving case with testing limited to Alcohol/Volatiles analysis

DUI: impaired driving case with Alcohol and Drug analysis

DRE: impaired driving case with Drug Recognition Expert evaluation completed

Sustainability

The adjustments to the proviso in the 2026 Supplemental Session mitigated several challenges associated with the original scope of the funding. These adjustments allow the lab to maintain the high-throughput lab through FY29 and permit allocation of resources towards existing, proven backlog and turnaround reduction strategies, all of which will improve the overall return on this investment.

However, the ongoing or permanent funding for the high-throughput blood alcohol section FTEs is essential to maintain laboratory capacity and prevent future backlogs. Maintaining the high-throughput blood alcohol section and FTEs beyond 2029 will ensure:

- The investment in hiring and training is fully realized and provides lasting value.
- Staff remain available for court testimony, preserving case quality and eliminating the need for duplicative testing.
- Backlog reduction efforts are sustained and accelerated, promoting long-term efficiency.
- Operational stability is strengthened by supporting the laboratory's ability to rebuild full comprehensive testing capacity for all impaired driving cases and in-house testing of death investigation cases.
- The impact of projected retirements and natural attrition is minimized through a stable, trained workforce.