

Crime lab delay puts public at risk

Crime Lab 3/10/08 D+C 9A

Inarguably, Monroe County needs an updated public safety crime lab. The current facility is cramped, outdated and severely backlogged.

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The crime lab has profound public safety responsibilities, including testing almost 900 firearms a year for possible criminal links, and analyzing DNA in sex offender cases and evidence from almost 2,000 drug-related cases yearly. It is possible that law enforcement possesses weapons that are



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It has been almost four years since county administrative officials proposed building a new lab, and there is still no definite plan for the project. In fact, the crime lab doesn't even appear in the proposed Capital Improvement Program, a six-year outline of the county's construction, renovation and rehabilitation projects.

It is tied to more than one crime, but because we lack the resources to test them in a timely manner, victims of those crimes could be left without the resolution they deserve.

When Monroe County Executive Maggie Brooks proposed this critically needed project, the cost was estimated at \$12 million; now it's \$30 million. More delays will result in higher costs.

The location of the new crime lab has also become a matter of concern. Reportedly, some of the sites initially considered by the Brooks administration are properties linked to former GOP county legislator and GOP contributor Peter Formicola.

We must ensure that political considerations play no role in the selection of our lab's location, a point our local

Assembly delegation correctly raised when approached for state funding assistance. The site should be chosen with cost-effectiveness, efficiency of use and accessibility as top priorities.

Building a new crime lab must be a primary goal for our county; its need is clearly documented and is a matter of public safety. Each delay will lead to higher costs, in terms of construction and human resources. Moreover, when a district attorney has to wait months for evidence tests to be returned, justice is delayed. As we all know, justice delayed is justice denied. Either of those outcomes is unacceptable when a solution is within our reach.

County officials must work together to guarantee this project is completed in a timely, responsible manner. Doing so will ensure that taxpayer funds are used wisely and will provide our law enforcement partners with the tools they need to solve crimes and keep our communities safe. □

Bronson, D-Rochester, is minority leader in the Monroe County Legislature.