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NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AG Kaul Highlights Need for Crime Lab Toxicology Positions, Technology to Address Evolving Drug Epidemic

MADISON, Wis. – Attorney General Josh Kaul today joined Division of Forensic Science (DFS) leadership and Columbia County District Attorney Brenda Yaskal to highlight the need for the authority to hire four additional toxicology positions and purchase new instrumentation to address the changing drug epidemic in Wisconsin. The positions and instrumentation will be funded through program revenue, the Wisconsin Department of Justice (DOJ) is simply requesting the legislature to approve the position and expenditure authority.

“Updated technology and additional experts at the crime labs will help in combating the changing drug epidemic in Wisconsin,” said Attorney General Kaul. “I’m hopeful that the legislature will agree and allow DOJ to use available funds to hire additional toxicology staff and purchase new technology.”

“Working with the Wisconsin State Crime Lab, Columbia County has been able to prosecute those who bring dangerous narcotics into our communities. Additional toxicologists and equipment will help ensure the crime lab is able to continue helping us combat the drug epidemic in Columbia County,” said Columbia County District Attorney Brenda Yaskal.

Dangerous synthetic drugs continue to evolve in chemical composition and are increasing in prevalence. Law enforcement must have the tools and resources necessary to keep pace with enterprising criminals and keep our communities safe.

Background

DOJ's budget includes a request for the authority to hire four additional toxicology positions and updated instrumentation for the Wisconsin State Crime Laboratories (WSCL). These positions and instrumentation will be fully funded by program revenues from the DNA and Crime Lab and Drug Law Enforcement surcharges, meaning DOJ is merely requesting the position and expenditure authority. Total funding available to support this request is \$933,800, including \$455,000 for instrumentation.

DFS has seen an uptick in number of toxicology cases, where crimes range from traffic incidents to homicide, sexual assault to bail jumping. The complexity of the drug compounds in these cases has also increased, resulting in slightly longer average turnaround time, 36 days in 2019 to 39 days in 2020.

Position Request: The Forensic Toxicology Unit identifies and quantifies drugs and alcohol in biological samples submitted by law enforcement agencies related to felony investigations.

- The legislature made a significant investment in the crime labs in the last state budget. However, DOJ did not receive everything requested, seeking 15 positions and receiving nine.
- In recognition of the current budget challenges, rather than simply requesting everything DOJ did not receive in the last budget, DOJ's request focused on the area of greatest need to fight the drug epidemic.

Instrumentation Request: The instrumentation is called a Liquid chromatography- Tandem Mass Spectrometry (LC/MS/MS) and is able to identify synthetic drugs and drug analogues that are toxic at very low levels, including buprenorphine, fentanyl analogues, benzodiazepines, and synthetic cannabinoids. The state crime lab does not currently have the ability to identify low levels of these drugs in biological samples.