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Worthy blasts Detroit police for audit's findings on crime lab

She calls audit findings appalling

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Wayne County Prosecutor Kym Worthy castigated the Detroit Police Department on Wednesday for mismanaging the city's crime lab, potentially compromising countless cases prosecuted by her office that relied on evidence processed by the lab before its closing in September.

Worthy told the Detroit City Council there were "appalling findings" in a full audit report from the Michigan State Police about the department's firearms section of the lab at a meeting with the Detroit City Council.

The final audit by State Police found 10% of firearms evidence processed by the Detroit lab was inaccurate in criminal cases, according to Worthy. This is the same error rate reported in a preliminary MSP report in September that prompted the lab's closing.

"I cannot have anybody convicted based on this kind of evidence that's inaccurate," said Worthy, who received the report Wednesday. "An error rate of zero is the only acceptable rate."

Police Chief James Barren and Mayor Ken Cockrel, Jr. closed the lab in September, including the lab's DNA, fingerprint, chemical and explosives analysis sections.

Worthy said it would cost her office around \$800,000 to review five years of criminal cases, and she said the city of Detroit must pay for it. She also gave the rest of the lab a vote of no confidence, citing low staffing for work done in a building she said should be condemned.

Representatives for Barren, State Police Col. Peter Munoz and around a dozen former Detroit police crime lab employees attended the full council meeting Wednesday.

State Police Capt. Mike Thomas confirmed the report found "numerous errors made by multiple examiners" in the firearms unit. Detroit Police Cmdr. Daniel O'Neill said issues with the lab were "indicative of a systemic problem in the lab." But he took pains to explain that the firearms unit was the only section audited.

"The burden is on us to prove that our other areas are good," O'Neill said, calling the staff "extremely professional."

The staff of civilian scientists and forensic technicians have continued to report to work at the lab since its shutdown in September, but they have shipped all evidence to the State Police crime lab for

processing.

Bill Steiner, a forensic chemist with the lab for more than 13 years, said he and his colleagues have been anxious for weeks about their jobs. "We're paying the price for somebody else's negligence," he said.

Problems in the lab's firearms section were discovered this summer when an independent, retired Michigan State Police firearms expert found that two weapons were used in the May 2007 slayings of two men. Detroit police lab investigators said 42 gun shell casings found at the scene were fired from the same weapon.

Council President Monica Conyers and President Pro Tem JoAnn Watson called for an independent audit of the entire crime lab. They also asked for the city's auditor general to track how money from a \$20-million bond issue in 2003 that was designated, at least in part, for a new crime lab, was spent.

Police said that so far around \$10 million was used to purchase and refurbish property for the new crime lab at 1400 Rosa Parks Blvd.
