



HOUSE BILL 323: Assess Costs of Local LEO Crime Lab Analysis.

2019-2020 General Assembly

Committee:		Date:	December 12, 2019
Introduced by:		Prepared by:	Bill Patterson Staff Attorney
Analysis of:	S.L. 2019-150		

OVERVIEW: *S.L. 2019-150 allows judges to order, and local governments and local law enforcement units to receive, court costs for lab services performed by a privately-owned lab or for the services of an expert witness employed by a privately-owned lab.*

The act became effective July 1, 2019, and applies to costs assessed on or after that date.

CURRENT LAW: In a criminal action the court can order certain costs to be assessed against a defendant who is convicted. G.S. 7A-304(a)(8), (9b), and (12) currently allow costs to be assessed for the services of crime laboratory facilities operated by a local government, or a group of local governments, in certain cases in which the laboratory has performed certain types of analysis or has provided an expert witness to testify to results of an analysis performed by the lab.

Specifically:

- **G.S. 7A-304(a)(8)** requires a judge to order payment of \$600 to be remitted to the general fund of the local government that operates a laboratory that, as part of the investigation leading to the defendant's conviction, performed DNA analysis of the crime, a test of the defendant's bodily fluids for the presence of alcohol or controlled substances, or an analysis of any controlled substance possessed by the defendant. The proceeds are to be used for law enforcement purposes.
- **G.S. 7A-304(a)(9b)** requires a judge to order payment of \$600 to be remitted to the general fund of the local law enforcement unit in cases in which, as part of the investigation leading to the defendant's conviction, a local government laboratory performed digital forensics that is the equivalent of the same kind of work performed by the North Carolina State Crime Laboratory for which costs may also be assessed. The proceeds are to be used for laboratory purposes.
- **G.S. 7A-304(a)(12)** requires a judge to order payment of \$600 to be remitted to the general fund of the local government unit that operates the laboratory for the services of an expert witness employed by the laboratory who completed a chemical analysis, a forensic analysis, or a digital forensics analysis and provides testimony about that analysis in a defendant's trial. This cost is in addition to any cost assessed under (a)(8) or (a)(9b). The proceeds are to be used for the local law enforcement laboratory.

BILL ANALYSIS: S.L. 2019-150 removes the limitation requiring the lab to be operated by a local government or group of local governments and allows the fee to be assessed for the services of any crime laboratory facility or expert witness employed by the crime laboratory. The costs assessed under G.S. 7A-304(a)(8) would still be required to be used by the local government for law enforcement purposes. The costs assessed under 7A-304(a)(9b) and 7A-304(a)(12) would be required to be used for laboratory services.

EFFECTIVE DATE: The act became effective July 1, 2019, and applies to costs assessed on or after that date.

Legislative Analysis Division Staff Attorney Trina Griffin substantially contributed to this summary.

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