



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT *of* STATE

RON DESANTIS
Governor

CORD BYRD
Secretary of State

April 16, 2025

The Honorable Governor Ron DeSantis
Executive Office of the Governor
PL 05 The Capitol
400 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

The Honorable Ben Albritton
Office of the Senate President
409 The Capitol
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

The Honorable Daniel Perez
Office of the Speaker of the Florida House of Representatives
420 The Capitol
402 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis, President Albritton, and Speaker Perez,

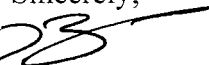
We provide this update consistent with the Office of Election Crimes and Security's obligations to keep you informed on the Office's activities. In its two most recent reports, the Office has identified and discussed fraud-related concerns specific to the petition gathering process for proposed constitutional initiatives. Among other things, the reports discussed incidents of false positives—the acceptance of petitions that should have been rejected because the voter's signature on file with the local supervisor fails to match the signature on the petition. The problem was particularly acute where the sponsors of proposed initiatives hired known or suspected fraudsters to collect petitions.

Since submitting its most recent reports, the Office has engaged with a signature-matching expert to further study the problem of false positives. We attach that expert's report to this letter, along with a copy of the expert's Curriculum Vitae (CV).

The Office would like to take the opportunity to thank Supervisor Wendy Link and her staff for accommodating its many requests over the past few months, as well as for her diligence in identifying and reporting circulators who submitted fraudulent petitions in Palm Beach County. Supervisor Link's cooperation has allowed the Office to complete reviews and audits under tight time constraints.

As you will see, the expert analysis confirms the Office's initial conclusions: known and suspected fraudsters were used to gather petitions—thousands in the two-county sample—and approximately one in five of the petitions accepted from these known or suspected fraudsters should have been rejected. It is worth noting, this expert analyzed validated petitions for signature-matching only, whereas the previous audits conducted by the Office were not limited to review of signature match only and also included evaluation of other statutory criteria (i.e. petitions containing missing or incorrect information, etc.)

This expert analysis confirms that a gap exists in the State's regulatory regime. We thank you for your efforts to fill the gap and ensure, as best you can, that changes to the State's Constitution are free from fraud and abuse.

Sincerely,


Brad McVay
Florida Deputy Secretary of State
for Legal Affairs & Election Integrity

Member:
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American Academy of
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Forensic Document Examiners

Thomas W. Vastrick

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April 15, 2025

**REPORT OF TECHNICAL REVIEW OF SCREENER ACCEPTANCE OF PETITIONS ORIGINATING FROM
COLLECTORS WHO ARE KNOWN OR SUSPECTED FRAUDSTERS**

Work Assignment

Conduct a technical review of the accepted petitions for Initiatives 22-05 and 23-07 at assigned counties that were collected by those who are known or suspected fraudsters (hereafter referred to as *petitions*). To date, these counties consist of Orange and Palm Beach.

For purposes of this report the term *collector* is used to describe the individual who obtained purported voter signatures on petitions. The term *screner* is used to describe the employee (temporary or staff) assigned to determine whether the petitions contain voter signatures that should be accepted or rejected. The term *reviewer* refers to Thomas W. Vastrick, who was the sole reviewer throughout. The term *false positive* is defined as petition signature acceptance decisions by screeners that were determined to have been wrongly accepted by the reviewer.

Selection of Petitions Reviewed

The technical review was conducted on a sampling of the total initiative petitions as noted above. For Palm Beach County, the petitions selected were based on the surname of the voter from a spreadsheet in which the voter surnames were in alphabetical order. The starting point was the first letter of the surname of a randomly selected letter of the alphabet using the random selection site Random Word Generator (randomwordgenerator.com) – itself randomly selected. This examiner selected the randomizing process based on the understanding that the voter surname was fully independent of any information sought in the examination. The petitions were then examined in alphabetical order beginning with the first voter in the alphabetized spreadsheet whose surname began with the selected random letter and continuing until the desired number of samples was achieved.

For Orange County, sampling was based on the number of accepted ballots by collector. All petitions were examined from most collectors. Due to time limitations near the end of the review only a sampling from collectors with large numbers of collected petitions was examined.

The sampling results were as follows:

	<u>TOTAL NUMBER OF PETITIONS*</u>	<u>PETITIONS EXAMINED</u>
ORANGE CO. 23-07	2,212	1,843
PALM BEACH CO. 22-05	3,634	1,110
PALM BEACH CO. 23-07	19,729	1,004

* The total number of petitions references the total number of accepted petitions provided to this reviewer from collectors who are known or suspected fraudsters.

Selection of Specimens

Voter documentation with images of various voter forms (or DMV digital signatures) are kept by both the state and the counties. It was understood that the two collections do not bear the exact same content and that the county level collection is considered more comprehensive. Collections by the state were available at the Department of State or remotely on department computers. Collections by the county required on-site reviews at the SOE offices. The collection used by this reviewer was based solely on what was used by the screeners in order to avoid any unnecessary variances in the review process that could influence the results. In both instances the quality of the digital reproductions was appropriate for comparison purposes. The collections used were as follows:

<u>COUNTY</u>	<u>COLLECTION USED</u>
Orange	State
Palm Beach	County

Process of Examination

The review consisted of a multiscreen review of documentation. One screen contained the petition signature and another screen contained the collection of voter documents through which specimens could be scrolled. The voter signatures could be, and were, enlarged for comparison purposes. As per the video training for screeners the following specific types of characteristics were noted and compared:

- Spacing
- Letter height ratios
- Baseline habits
- Letter connections
- Initial and terminal strokes
- Letter design
- Slant

The training video also includes pen pressure as an individual characteristic to review but this specific characteristic can only be examined using original "wet ink" documents. Examination of this factor based on digital copies is unreliable and was not used in this review.

The burden of proof for screening petitions was preponderance of the evidence. This differs from the burden of proof for mail ballot signature rejection (beyond a reasonable doubt). Ultimately, the differentiation in the burden of proof had limited effect on the results as the vast majority of the petitions rejected were obvious in nature.

Results

As noted earlier, false positives are defined as petition acceptance decisions that were determined to have been wrongly accepted by this reviewer. The results were as follows:

	<u>PETITIONS EXAMINED</u>	<u>NO. FALSE POSITIVES</u>	<u>% FALSE POSITIVES</u>
ORANGE CO. 23-07	1,843	401	21.8
PALM BEACH CO. 22-05	1,110	188	16.9
PALM BEACH CO. 23-07	1,004	155	15.4

Ninety-five percent (95%) confidence limits were calculated for each of the above percentages and are as follows:

	<u>% FALSE POSITIVES</u>	<u>95% CONFIDENCE LIMITS (PLUS OR MINUS)</u>
ORANGE CO. 23-07	21.8	1.9%
PALM BEACH CO. 22-05	16.9	2.2%
PALM BEACH CO. 23-07	15.4	2.2%

Observations

Throughout the technical review, consideration was given to the root cause(s) of the erroneous decisions from the viewpoint of the reviewer's knowledge, education, experience, and training. Various hypotheses are as follows:

1. The signature screening training was inadequate. For full disclosure purposes, this reviewer was also the lecturer in the training videos viewed by the screeners during their training.
2. The screeners did not sufficiently retain the training.
3. The screeners were overworked.
4. The screeners did not carefully execute their duties.

Throughout the technical review it was noted that a large portion of erroneous decisions were obvious and did not coincide with the training protocol. This includes hand printing to cursive entries comparisons that should be virtual automatic rejections, and instances in which there were no features of similarity for any of the areas of examination that were taught in the training video. This observation was not found in just a few instances but rather in the vast majority of erroneous acceptances. As such, the evidence supports that the root cause of the deficiencies was not the training.

My interview with Palm Beach County SOE Wendy Sartory Link provided some valuable insight into possible root causes of the erroneous acceptances. Large counties rely on many temporary workers that have had no experience in signature screening. These workers were not tested for either their eyesight or form blindness prior to hiring, nor were there any procedures in place to test the workers, subsequent to their viewing of the training video, for knowledge retention or ability to maintain concentration levels over time, to my knowledge. Ms. Link noted that her election office is, at times, overwhelmed by the number of petitions submitted. As such, there may currently be no time for testing. Also, screening is done over long and continuous hours. This atmosphere is ripe for mental fatigue that can, and will, cause lapses in concentration and resulting errors. Based on the comments by Ms. Link and the obvious nature of the erroneous decisions, the evidence supports that the root cause(s) would be Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, or any combination of same.

Based on reviews to date, it is noted that the results of Orange and Palm Beach County are similar, thus giving support to a likelihood that the root causes are systemic, at least in counties with significant populations.

Reviewer Qualifications

A copy of my curriculum vitae is attached.



Thomas W. Vastrick
Forensic Document Examiner

Member:
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American Academy of
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Southeastern Association of
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Certified:
American Board of Forensic
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CURRICULUM VITAE

1. Education and Training

Bachelor of Science in Forensic Science with Minor in Chemistry from California State University at Sacramento, 1977.

Two-year, full-time, in-residence training program with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service Headquarters Crime Laboratory in Washington, DC from 1977 to 1979.

2. Experience

Full-time Forensic Document Examiner with the U.S. Postal Inspection Service Southern Region Crime Laboratory from 1980 to 1992.

Private consulting services in Forensic Document Examination since 1990.

Research Manager, National Center for Forensic Science, University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL 2011 to 2015

Examinations include handwriting, hand printing, alterations, typewriting, computer generated documents, indented writing, counterfeiting, nondestructive ink & paper analyses, burned and soaked document restoration, sequence of strokes, office machine products, and mechanical impressions.

3. Courtroom Testimony

Have testified as an expert in Forensic Document Examination over 400 times and provided over 100 depositions. Have testified in federal, state and local courts along with military hearings, arbitration hearings and administrative law hearings.

Have testified in Federal District Court in:

Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Texas.

Have testified in the state courts in:

Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas.

4. Certification

Certified through technical testing by the American Board of Forensic Document Examiners (ABFDE) continuously since 1982. The ABFDE is the only certification body that is recognized by all federal government agencies employing Forensic Document Examiners along with many state and municipal law enforcement agencies. The ABFDE is also the only certification board with Diplomates that meet published standards for required education and training with 100% compliance.

Served on the ABFDE Board of Directors 1987 to 1995.

Served as Secretary of the ABFDE Board of Directors 1991 to 1995.

5. Professional Affiliations

- American Society of Questioned Document Examiners (ASQDE)
 - President – 2024 to present
 - Secretary – 2018 to 2020, 2022 to 2024
 - Regular Member – 1982 to 2019
 - Life Member – 2019 to present
 - Program Chair - 1993
 - Journal Editorial Staff – 2000 to present
 - Newsletter Editor – 1983 to 1992
- American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS)
 - Retired Fellow - Questioned Documents Section – 2020 to present
 - Fellow 2004 to 2020
 - Member 1995 to 2004
 - Section Chairman – Questioned Documents Section – 2012 to 2016
 - Academy Board of Directors – 2017 to 2021
- Southeast Association of Forensic Document Examiners (SAFDE)
 - Program Chairman – 1997, 1998, 2000, 2011
 - Workshop Facilitator – 1998, 2001
 - Regular Member – 1980s to present
- Academy Standards Board – Forensic Document Examination Consensus Body
 - 2017 to present
- Expert Working Group on Human Factors in Handwriting Examination (work completed)
 - U.S. Department of Commerce
 - National Institute of Standards and Technology
 - 2015 to 2020
- Scientific Working Group – Forensic Document Examination (not currently active)
 - Main SWGDOC Committee – 1999 to 2001
 - Legal Issues Sub-committee Chairman – 1999 to 2001
 - Executive Committee – 1999 to 2001
 - Working Committee – 2001 to 2014

6. Published Research Papers

- ***A NON-DESTRUCTIVE PRELIMINARY TEST FOR THE DETERMINATION OF PAGE INSERTION OF A MULTIPAGED QUESTIONED DOCUMENT*** - published in Identification News, Vol. 31, No. 9, September 1981.
- ***CHECKWRITER IDENTIFICATION - INDIVIDUALITY*** - published in Journal of Forensic Sciences, Vol. 27, No. 1, January 1982.
- ***ILLUSIONS OF TRACING*** - published in Journal of Forensic Sciences, Vol. 27, No.1, January 1982.
- ***THE EXAMINATION OF NOTARY SEALS*** - published in Journal of Forensic Science, Vol. 27, No. 4, October 1982.
- ***THE FORENSIC VALUE OF RIGHT-HAND JUSTIFICATION*** - published in Forensic Science International, 1990.
- ***FRAUD AND QUESTIONED DOCUMENT EXAMINATION*** - Published in The White Paper, Vol. 7, No. 2, April-May 1993.
- ***SOLVE THE CROSS-WORD PUZZLE*** - Published in Security Management, December 1994.

6. Published Research Papers (continued)

- ***DEPOSING FORENSIC EXPERT WITNESSES: AN EXPERT'S VIEWPOINT*** – Published in The Memphis Bar Association Magazine, December 1995.
- ***HAS THAT DOCUMENT BEEN ALTERED*** - Published in The Florida Defender, Fall, 1998.
- ***THE UNIQUENESS OF HANDWRITING*** - Published in the inaugural edition of the Journal of American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, Vol. 1 No. 1, 1998.
- ***INDENTED WRITING: THE INVISIBLE EVIDENCE*** – Published in The Florida Defender, FLL, 1999.
- ***SELECTING A QUALIFIED FORENSIC DOCUMENT EXAMINER*** - Published in The Florida Defender, Fall, 2001.
- ***CLUES OF INK*** - Published in FSA Times (The Institute of Internal Auditors), Vol. 2, No. 2, 2003.
- ***ADMISSIBILITY ISSUES IN FORENSIC DOCUMENT EXAMINATION*** - Published in The Journal of American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, Vol 7, No. 1, 2004.
- ***IS IT REAL? PROVING (OR DISPROVING) THE AUTHENTICITY OF IMMIGRATION DOCUMENTS*** – Published in the Tennessee Bar Journal, Vol. 42, No. 7, 2006.
- ***DEVELOPMENT OF AN EXTENSIVE FORENSIC HANDWRITING DATABASE – STATISTICAL COMPONENTS*** – Papers from the Seventh International Workshop on Statistical Simulation, Rimini, Italy (co-author, non-presenter)
- ***FORENSIC HANDWRITING COMPARISON EXAMINATION IN THE COURTROOM*** – Published in The Judges' Journal, American Bar Association, Vol. 54, No. 3, Summer 2015.
- ***MEASURING THE FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE OF HANDWRITING AND HAND PRINTING CHARACTERISTICS*** – (co-author) – published in Journal of Forensic Sciences, Vol 62, No. 1, 2017. doi: 10.1111/1556-4029.13248
- ***MEASURING THE FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE OF HANDWRITTEN NUMERAL CHARACTERISTICS*** – (co-author) – published in Journal of Forensic Sciences, Vol 63, No. 4, 2018. doi: 10.1111/1556-4029.13678 (Selected as JFS 2018 Noteworthy Article)
- ***MEASURING THE FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE OF HANDWRITTEN NUMERAL CHARACTERISTICS – AN EXPANDED LIST*** (co-author) – published in Journal of Forensic Sciences, Vol 66, No. 1, 2021. doi: 10.1111/1556-4029.14559
- ***INSTITUTIONAL PREJUDICE BY THE COURTS INVOLVING CERTAIN OPPOSING HANDWRITING OPINIONS*** (co-author) – published as Letter to the Editor (not peer-reviewed) in Journal of the American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, Vol 24, No. 1, 2021. ISSN 1524-7287

7. Professional Papers (unpublished) and Presentations

- ***CHECKWRITER IDENTIFICATION*** - ASQDE, Rochester, NY, 1979.
- ***AN UPDATE OF MODEL DIFFERENTIATION OF CHECKWRITERS BY DOMESTIC MANUFACTURERS*** - ASQDE - North Lake Tahoe, NV, 1983.
- ***THE USE OF VIDEOTAPES TO ENHANCE COURTROOM PRESENTATIONS*** - ASQDE, Montreal, Canada, 1985.
- ***PLASTIC PAPER AS A QUESTIONED DOCUMENT*** - ASQDE, Savannah, GA, 1986.
- ***STANDARD REGISTER CHECKWRITERS*** - ASQDE, San Jose, CA, 1990.
- ***COMPARATIVE ANALYSES OF PHOTOGRAPHIC FILMS, PAPERS, CHEMICALS AND TECHNIQUES FOR USE ON DEMONSTRATIVE COURT CHARTS*** - ASQDE, Kissimmee, FL, 1991.
- ***A NEW DOMESTIC CHECKWRITER MANUFACTURER*** - ASQDE, Ottawa, Canada, 1993.

7. Professional Papers (unpublished) and Presentations (continued)

- **COMPUTERIZED HANDWRITING** - ASQDE, Long Beach, CA, 1994.
- **THE UNIQUENESS OF HANDWRITING - SURVEY RESULTS** - ASQDE, Chicago, IL, 1995.
- **PRESENTATION SOFTWARE** - ASQDE, Chicago, IL, 1995.
- **A COLLECTION OF FAX FONTS, PART II** (Contributor) - ASQDE, Chicago, IL, 1995.
- **THE THIRD EXAMINER** - ASQDE, Phoenix, AZ, 1997.
- **AN OVERVIEW OF POINT AND SHOOT DIGITAL CAMERAS** – AAFS, San Francisco, CA, 1998.
- **THE EXPERT CRITIC IN A CIVIL MATTER** – SAFDE, Atlanta, GA, 1999.
- **A CRITICAL LOOK AT CRITICS** – MAFS/SWAFS joint meeting, Cape Girardeau, MO, 1999.
- **THE SKILL LEVEL OF PSEUDO-TREMOR** – ASQDE, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 2000.
- **HOW KNOWN ARE THOSE KNOWN** – AAFS, Atlanta, GA, 2002.
- **HANDWRITING IDENTIFICATION – BACK TO REALITY** – ASQDE, San Diego, CA, 2002.
- **THE PITFALLS OF BAD SCIENCE** – ASQDE, Memphis, TN, 2004.
- **CASE REVIEW: METHODOLOGY STANDARDIZATION** – ASQDE, Boulder, CO, 2007.
- **FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE OF VARIATION AS A TOOL FOR (DIS) ASSOCIATION OF HANDWRITING** – SAFDE, 2010.
- **JUNK CRITICISM IN THE COURTROOM** – AAFS, Chicago, IL, 2011.
- **INSTITUTIONAL PREJUDICE AGAINST INDETERMINATE CONCLUSIONS** – SAFDE, Atlanta, GA, 2011.
- **CURRENT STATUS OF FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE STUDY** – AAFS, Washington, DC, 2013.
- **TACKY CONCLUSIONS – SIGNATURE TRANSFER BY TAPE?** – SAFDE, Atlanta, GA, 2013.
- **TRENDS IN FREQUENCY OCCURRENCE STUDY** – NIST, Gaithersburg, MD, 2013.
- **OH BROTHER, ANOTHER PAPER ON FOLLOWING PROCEDURES** – AAFS, Las Vegas, NV, 2016.
- **EMPLOYMENT IN FORENSIC SCIENCE THROUGH RESEARCH** – AAFS Young Forensic Scientists Forum, Seattle, WA, 2018.
- **ADVANCING YOUR CAREER** – AAFS Young Forensic Scientists Forum, Baltimore, MD, 2019.
- **DECIPHERMENT OF LATENT HANDWRITING IMPRESSIONS – POINT/COUNTERPOINT** – AAFS, Anaheim, CA, 2020.
- **BASICS OF EXPERT TESTIMONY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF AN EXPERT WITNESS** – ASQDE, Virtual, 2020.
- **INTRA-WRITER FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE AS A TOOL OR PROCESS FOR ASSOCIATION AND DISSOCIATION OF HANDWRITING** – ASQDE, Virtual, 2020.
- **TIGER KING; FORENSIC DOCUMENT EVIDENCE INVOLVING THE DISAPPEARANCE OF JACK DONALD LEWIS** – AAFS, Virtual, 2021.
- **INSTITUTIONAL PREJUDICE BY THE COURTS INVOLVING CERTAIN OPPOSING HANDWRITING OPINIONS** – AAFS, Seattle, WA, 2022
- **REPORT WRITING IN A NEW RULE 702 WORLD – HANDWRITING COMPARISON EXAMINATION** – AAFS, half-day workshop, Orlando, FL, 2023

7. Professional Papers (unpublished) and Presentations (continued)

- **REPORT WRITING IN THE UNITED STATES** – International Knowledge Exchange on Documents, Virtual, 2023
- **FORENSIC DOCUMENT EXAMINATION: A DYING DISCIPLINE OR AN EMERGING ENTITY** – SAFDE, Peachtree City, GA, 2023
- **STANDARDS OR GUIDELINES** – SAFDE, Peachtree City, GA, 2023
- **THE HITLER DIARIES REVISITED** – AAFS, Denver, CO, 2024
- **CASE STUDIES OF KNOWN HANDWRITING SPECIMENS** – ASQDE, Atlanta, GA, 2024

8. Books and Publications

- **THE CLASSIFICATION AND IDENTIFICATION OF CHECKWRITERS** - a monograph published by The American Board of Forensic Document Examiners, 1991.
- **FORENSIC DOCUMENT EXAMINATION TECHNIQUES** – published by The Institute of Internal Auditors Research Foundation, 2004, ISBN 0-89413-541-4.
- **FORENSIC SCIENCE AND LAW: INVESTIGATIVE APPLICATIONS IN CRIMINAL, CIVIL AND FAMILY JUSTICE** – published by CRC Press, 2005, ISBN 0-8493-1970-6 (contributing author).
- **SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION OF QUESTIONED DOCUMENTS – SECOND EDITION** – published by CRC Press, 2006, ISBN 0-8493-2044-5 (contributing author).
- **FORENSIC HANDWRITING EXAMINATION AND HUMAN FACTORS: IMPROVING THE PRACTICE THROUGH A SYSTEMS APPROACH** – published by National Institute of Standards and Technology, Department of Commerce in conjunction with the National Institute of Justice, Department of Justice NIST.IR.8282, 2020 (contributing author).
- **FORENSIC DOCUMENT EXAMINATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY** – published by CRC Press, 2020, ISBN 9780367251550 (contributing author).

9. Teaching Experience

Conducted lectures and workshops for American Academy of Forensic Sciences, American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, University of Memphis Law School, University of Central Florida, National Center for Forensic Science, State Technical Institute at Memphis, Institute of Police Technology & Management's Public Safety Institute Division, Union University, Institute of Internal Auditors, state bar association conventions, district attorneys general convention, banks, election officials, insurance investigators, fraud investigators, private investigators, attorneys, law enforcement personnel and other document examiners concerning empirical statistics in handwriting; handwriting specimens; detecting forgeries; alterations; and capabilities of Forensic Document Examiners.

Primary trainer for interns in forensic document examination from University of Central Florida.

Course Administrator for National Center for Forensic Sciences post graduate certificate course.

Training officer for government document examiners supplemental training, Instituto de Ciencias Forenses de Puerto Rico.

Conducted technical workshops concerning handwriting, signatures, frequency occurrence of handwriting and hand printing characteristics, legal issues, report writing, and checkwriters at various regional and national conferences of forensic document examiners.

Conducted training of signature, petition, and ballot examinations for the State of Florida Supervisors of Election statewide along with periodic county-level training classes.

10. Awards

Special Recognition Award for Research and Advancement of Profession – American Society of Questioned Document Examiners, 2016.

Ordway Hilton Award (for sustained superior contributions to The American Academy of Forensic Sciences, The Questioned Document Section of The American Academy of Forensic Sciences, and the forensic science community) – American Academy of Forensic Sciences, 2018