



## Position Paper on Limited Tenure

The Canadian Friction Ridge Working Group (CanFRWG) does not support the use of limited tenure policies within Forensic Identification Services. Such practices diminish institutional knowledge, technical expertise, operational efficiency, and leadership capabilities with pronounced impacts in the field of friction ridge examination.

### **Background**

Across Canadian law enforcement agencies, the duration that Forensic Identification members may serve within Forensic Identification Services varies. For this position statement, 'limited tenure' refers to policies that restrict how long a member may occupy a position within Forensic Identification Services.

Forensic Identification members in Canada typically serve as generalists and are expected to develop competence across a range of forensic disciplines. Disciplines include crime scene processing, evidence collection and documentation, and expert analysis in the comparative sciences (e.g., fingerprints, footwear, tire impressions, and physical match evidence). Proficiency in these areas requires substantial education, mentorship, casework experience, and continuous professional development.

The field of Forensic Identification, particularly friction ridge analysis, has seen significant advancement in recent years. Peer-reviewed research and evolving best practices have elevated the standards and expectations for practitioners. Achieving proficiency in conducting complex friction ridge comparisons is a long-term process that demands both training and cumulative experience.

### **Summary of Position**

Enforcing limited tenure, while members are still developing their friction ridge comparison expertise, can hinder the growth of qualified experts and create gaps in service delivery to the justice system. Limited tenure disrupts leadership development and succession planning, and it places a recurring financial burden on agencies due to the need for constant retraining through both foundational and advanced forensic courses.

Not all members are suited for work in forensic disciplines. Many who pursue positions in Forensic Identification Services demonstrate a natural aptitude and genuine interest in the field. Conversely, assigning members without this alignment of skills and motivation can result in substandard work and increased organizational risk.

Limited tenure may have been introduced with good intentions, such as to protect members from prolonged exposure to traumatic crime scenes or to broaden operational experience across the agency. However, occupational stress is not unique to forensic work. Forcing capable, committed, and experienced members out of Forensic Identification Services may in fact heighten stress levels and reduce job satisfaction. Members should always have the choice to transfer out of a unit voluntarily, but mandated term limits are not a suitable alternative.

### **Conclusion**

While rotational staffing may benefit other policing functions, CanFRWG holds that limited tenure is incompatible with the needs of the Forensic Identification discipline. The loss of skill, knowledge, and continuity outweighs any perceived benefit. The costs, both financial and operational, of continually replacing experienced members are not justified and do not serve the interests of law enforcement agencies or the communities they serve.

**Recommendation**

CanFRWG recommends Canadian law enforcement agencies eliminate limited tenure policies within Forensic Identification Services in favour of strategies that support retention, specialization, and professional growth.