Sure thing. And I believe I've testified on this topic in Committee on prior occasions. The screening tests are designed to provide information on drugs or drug categories that are likely to be found in the sample. Because of their intended use, they aren't designed to be 100%. The goal is to provide a direction for additional confirmatory testing using the equipment and methodology that's discussed at the bottom of page 9. Here at our lab, we use a screening instrument that's role is to guide us toward what drug or drugs to confirm the sample for. Confirmation testing of samples for drugs is extremely complex and isn't a one-shot deal. There are a variety of different extraction methods in order to get the drugs out of the blood and then different instrumental procedures to follow. For instance, we have a stand-alone procedure just to confirm for THC. A separate procedure is being designed for cocaine, fentanyl, morphine, and meth. A third for another panel of drugs. So on and so forth. The screening allows us to take a practical approach to confirmatory testing. Thus, why it's absolutely crucial to have general idea what's in the sample. When validating screening methods prior to implementation, labs have a good idea of which drugs have a higher likelihood of cross-reactivity, etc. and build safe guards into the procedures to account for that. At the end of the day, screening results are presumptive only - they give you a strong indication of what the sample contains, but it's the confirmatory testing that holds the weight.

Trisha L. Conti, Ph.D.
Director
Vermont Forensic Laboratory