

COMMISSION ON MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS MEETING MINUTES

January 12, 2024

The meeting of the Commission on Medicolegal Investigations was held at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) in Farmington, CT on Friday, January 12, 2024

Present: Todd D. Fernow, J.D. Chairman (Present)
Sidney M. Hopfer, PhD. Secretary (Present)
Jennifer Bourn, J.D. (Present)
John H. Sinard, M.D., Vice Chairman (Remotely)
Celia Pinzi (Remotely)

Absent: Beth Frugale, DPH
Michael Krinsky, M.D.
Susan Keane Baker, M.H.A.

Also Present: James R. Gill, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner
Maura E. DeJoseph, D.O., Deputy Chief Medical Examiner
Lincoln Dwayne Gordon, OCME Administrator
Holly Cuomo, Executive Secretary

Chairman Fernow called the meeting to order at 2:05 pm. This was a hybrid meeting as members who were unable to attend in-person were given a web-based link.

Chairman Fernow announced the passing of Doctors Bob Cone and Ed McDonough. Dr. Cone was a member of COMLI for many years and Dr. McDonough was a former Deputy Chief Medical Examiner.

The November 2023 minutes had been previously distributed for review. No additional corrections or changes were required, and the minutes were adopted.

Medical Examiner Summary:

Dr. Gill provided the Chief Medical Examiner report to the COMLI.

Autopsy Workload and Turnaround Times: Dr. Gill provided information regarding the 2023 autopsy numbers. 2,789 autopsies were performed this year, which is about a 10% decrease from the previous year. All full-time medical examiners performed fewer than 300 autopsies. The per diem physicians and fellows combined completed approximately 860 autopsies. The turnaround time for case completion has become longer and not all of the 2023 reports have been completed. In October 92% were completed within 90 days and just under 85% within 60 days. This segued into a conversation on death rate and the impact on previous years due to COVID and intoxication deaths and OCME's need for additional staffing.

Office Announcements: Dr. Gill announced that Dr. Melissa Pasquale-Styles has accepted a full-time AME position and will be starting in August. She is currently the Deputy Chief in Brooklyn. She will be an asset to our agency as she is a strong forensic pathologist, with vast experience with homicides and infant death investigation cases. Her Fellowships were completed in Miami and in Detroit.

Two openings remain for Assistant Medical Examiners; both Fellows have applied, as well as two outside applicants.

Michelle Clark, Lead Investigator, has been instrumental in identifying unidentified remains using forensic genetic genealogy, volunteering her own time to do so. She has also taken course on forensic genetic genealogy. With her lead, we identified a 1974 homicide victim and are working with the family to get DNA for confirmation. On behalf of OCME, Michelle will be giving a presentation on forensic genetic genealogy at the American Academy Forensic Science meeting on February 22, 2024.

Scene Investigations: Investigator scene attendance in November was 99%. The December data had not been completed as of this meeting.

Storage at Facility: We have 77 decedents stored at OCME, including 20 remains that have been onsite for over 30 days.

Facility Updates: The next meeting with DAS, OCME and the architecture firm is scheduled for the end of January to discuss the different proposals and determine which is the best option. Concerns of finding land, collaborating with UCONN, and the feasibility of a renovation vs. a new building were discussed. Updates will continue to be offered during subsequent meetings.

Fellowship Program: The two current forensic pathology fellows in our program are progressing well and have expressed interest in the vacant AME positions.

We will have one fellow starting in July 2024.

EDRS / Case Management System Interface: The electronic interface between EDRS and our Case Management system is still being finalized. An update will be provided at the next meeting.

Fiscal Summary:

Lincoln Dwayne Gordon provided the fiscal update for OCME.

Agency Staffing: The most recent organization chart was provided. As of December 1st, 57 full-time and 19 part-time positions are filled, leaving 6 vacant full-time positions and 3 vacant part-time positions. Recruiting efforts continue to fill the vacancies.

Human Resources: Michelle Clark and Imani Webb were promoted to Lead Special Investigators.

Fiscal:

Expenditures and Grants: The OCME is projecting a \$400,000 deficiency in personnel appropriation (PS). A portion of the deficit is due to overtime incurred to staff the third shift; with staffing adjustments our projected deficiency will be significantly less. OPM has until April 2024 to consider releasing the budgetary holdback to reduce the deficit.

Invoices remain outstanding for 2023 which impacts the budget summary. The funding allocated for equipment and Medicolegal expenses have been fully utilized by purchasing computers, gurneys, PPE, and other necessary products.

Lepow Fund: The Lepow Summary Sheet shows the steady balance with some accumulated interest. There is no expected usage of this fund.

CEPF: The Capital Equipment Purchase Fund money was used to purchase computers and monitors.

ARPA: Funding is primarily used for PPE, toxicology testing identified as ARPA compliant and refrigerated trailer.

Revenue: A summary of revenue streams was reviewed. Most of the revenue collected and posted comes from cremation certificates. OCME is projecting cremation revenue to be \$3.4 million by the end of the fiscal year. The remaining revenue comes from record requests, histology, and photographs (about \$60,000 per year). All revenue goes directly to the State General Fund.

Audit: Last year's audit report was just released. The audit for FY 2022-2023 is in process. Staff are working with the auditors to answer their questions. A spreadsheet has been created to track auditor's requests/questions.

Account Receivables: The outstanding balances have greatly decreased as a result of the increased electronic payments through EDRS.

New Business: *NOTE: 3:00 PM – Dr. Sinard left the meeting.*

Homicide Cremations: Discussed the current process of obtaining the State's Attorney permission to proceed with cremation which could delay releasing the body. A further review of the statute will take place, including consulting with the AG, if necessary, to see if we are bound to obtaining clearance and determining the best-case practice when releasing homicide cases. In the interim, the statute (19a-323) has been added to the SA letter.

Unclaimed Fetal Remains: DDS will not reimburse funeral directors for costs related to fetal remains. Discussed the option of creating a list of funeral homes that will assist by arranging the cremation of the unclaimed fetus. OCME could reimburse them for the cremation cost, however, the funeral home would not be reimbursed for their services or other expenses incurred. Further discussion will take place.

Other Conversations:

COMLI Officers: The Law Professor appointee position remains vacant.

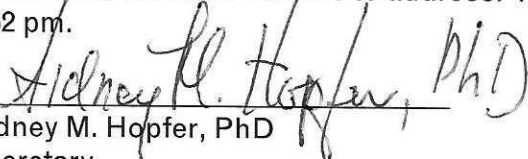
Election of Officers: Election of Officers remains a standard agenda item. As previously determined, members will stay in their current officer positions until they no longer wish to, or somebody else wishes to have an election, in which case an election will occur immediately.

Executive Session: An Executive Session was not needed.

Open Meeting: The next COMLI meeting is scheduled for March 8, 2024. Invitations will be sent to the representatives of its constituent groups.

Adjournment:

There were no other matters to address. Followed by a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 3:52 pm.


Sidney M. Hopper, PhD
Secretary