

COMMISSION ON MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS MEETING MINUTES

November 8, 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, November 8, 2024.

Present:

- Todd D. Fernow, J.D. Chairman (Present)
- John H. Sinard, M.D., Vice Chairman (Remotely)
- Sidney M. Hopfer, Ph.D., Secretary (Remotely)
- Michael Krinsky, M.D (Remotely)
- Jennifer Bourn, J.D. (Present)
- Beth Frugale, DPH (Present)
- Susan Keane Baker, M.H.A. (Remotely)
- Celia Pinzi (Remotely)

Also Present:

- James R. Gill, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner
- Maura E. DeJoseph, D.O., Deputy Chief Medical Examiner
- Lincoln Dwayne Gordon, OCME Administrator

Not Present:

- Holly Cuomo, OCME Executive Secretary

Chairman Fernow called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm.

The minutes from the September 13, 2024 meeting were adopted without corrections.

OPM Analyst Matt Lafayette had indicated interest in attending the meeting. He did not attend.

Medical Examiner Summary:

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

Autopsy Workload and Turnaround Times: It is projected that the full autopsy numbers will be around 2,600 for end of calendar year 2024. Case completion data was reviewed by quarter. It is expected that with full medical examiner staffing we will consistently meet the goal of 90% of reports completed within 60 days and 90 days. The toxicology turnaround time from the contracted vendor is consistently <20 days. The number of homicides year to date is down. Last year OCME certified 150 homicides, whereas this year the projection is approximately 100.

Medical Examiner Staffing: All of the newly hired Medical Examiners are fully integrated and doing well.

Scene Investigations: Investigators attending 99% of scenes.

Storage at Facility: There are currently 89 remains at OCME, including 25 that have been onsite for over 30 days. The Commission requested a graphic representation at future meetings to illustrate the trends in quota of remains at OCME for more than 30 days.

OCME Facility Updates: Dr. Gill will be attending an upcoming meeting with DAS/OPM/UCONN to discuss the need for a new facility, and other logistical matters associated with this project. It has been four years since OCME began these discussions with DAS. Approximately \$1.7 million has been spent to date.

Information Technology/EDRS Updates: Our CaseManager system was upgraded this week to the latest version, to facilitate the bridge to the electronic death registry. The goal for going live with the bridge is December 11, 2024.

Annual Report for National Association of Medical Examiners – The annual report was distributed to the COMLI membership for review and consideration. It was recommended to be an agenda item for next meeting, to give the COMLI time to digest the information.

Outreach Efforts of OCME – The outreach efforts of the office were highlighted by Dr. Gill, to include various mortality review panels, and data sharing agreements and interfaces.

Fiscal Summary:

Lincoln Dwayne Gordon provided the fiscal update for the office.

Agency Staffing: The September organizational chart was provided. Recruiting efforts continue to fill the vacancies created by staff shift changes or agency departure.

Human Resources: Interviews have been scheduled for the vacant FAO position. Two Forensic Techs have been hired and one medical record staff was promoted.

Fiscal:

Expenditures and Grants:

- OCME is projecting a very small deficit in personnel services for the budget. It will be monitored monthly.
- The operating expenses budgeted funding is projected to approximately meet the needs of OCME at the present.
- Minor equipment funding will be fully utilized.
- Medicolegal budget funding will be fully utilized for neuropathology consultant and other supplies related to the investigative needs.
- A carryover fund, authorized by OPM, has provided additional operating expenses funding to OCME in this year. This will cover the cost of the security detail. It was explained to COMLI that this amount of money was requested in the upcoming biennium as a technical adjustment to the OCME operating budget.

- The fellowship program expenditures are managed within the federal grant and OCME OE. The expenses are less this year given that the fellow is paid directly by the military. The fund will be used to purchase a microscope, and some other supplies required by the fellowship program.
- The Coverdell grants are being utilized for toxicology testing and body transportation costs.
- The SUDORS grants through DPH are being utilized for essential supplies/equipment including mortuary cots, gurneys, histology supplies, IT servers and some toxicology testing.

Lepow Fund: The Lepow Trust fund had no withdrawals, and the interest was recently posted.

ARPA: ARPA funds have been fully committed and all \$867,000 of funding over the past three years will be spent before the December deadline. The refrigerated tractor trailer continues to be an expense to the agency. This will be paid out of OE.

Revenue: A summary of revenue streams was reviewed. OCME is projecting revenue to be between \$3.3 and \$3.6 million by the end of the fiscal year. The projected revenue fluctuates based on cremation and medical record fees. All revenue goes directly to the State General Fund.

Account Receivables: The cremation reconciliation audits have been finalized for this quarter.

Old Business:

The topic of Medical Examiner objectivity and autonomy was discussed, based on a request during the prior meeting. Dr. Gill provided the previously established Office of State Ethics policy to COMLI. This is reviewed by all OCME staff annually. Additionally, Dr. Gill provided a working draft of operational guidelines for Medical Examiners. COMLI requested that this be an agenda item for the next meeting, so they have time to review, consider and respond.

The predominant issue raised is maintaining objectivity of the medical examiner, without undue pressures, and for there to be a standard pathway by which outside requests for re-review or amendment are requested and documented. Dr. Gill discussed the format of the daily meetings and the role they play in the objective approach to each case, and the discussions we have when questions are raised later. The state established the OCME as an independent agency with independent investigative abilities, and this should be maintained and supported.

COMLI Officers: One 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 positions until they no longer

wish to, or somebody else wishes to have an election, in which case an election will occur as soon as possible. An election did not take place.

New Business:

- A Commissioner raised a question about the statutes and regulations that authorize OCME to investigate the body of a deceased person and take jurisdiction issue in the context of the right of sepulcher. It was requested that this review occur by OCME, and the topic be on the agenda for next meeting. *[Comment: On 11/11/2024, the Attorney General's Office was asked to review. JG]*
- The proposed dates for the 2025 COMLI meetings were reviewed, corrected, and adopted by COMLI.

Other Conversations:

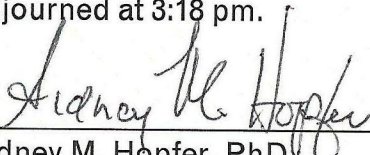
- A Commissioner inquired about the scope of toxicology testing, and whether we could detect fenethylline. This question will be investigated and the COMLI updated with the response. *[Note: Fenethylline (Captagon) is metabolized into amphetamine and theophylline following ingestion. Both drugs are detected in our toxicology testing. JG]*
- A Commissioner asked that in future meetings we present raw statistical data compared with OCME known trends. If we are to use comparative statistics, the source of the data should be referenced.
- COMLI requested that the NAME annual report be an agenda item for the next meeting. This will give the COMLI time to review and prepare comments for the next meeting.
- Dr. Gill explained the NAME accreditation phase deficiencies in greater detail. The facility-based deficiencies cannot be corrected until a new facility is established. The autopsy rate per doctor and case turnaround time deficiencies should be corrected with the new Medical Examiner staff and limited per diem support. OCME has requested a Data Scientist position in the next biennium budget to assist with addressing accreditation deficiency in data analysis.

Executive Session: An Executive Session was not needed.

Next Meeting: The next COMLI meeting is scheduled for January 24, 2025.

Adjournment:

There were no other matters to address. Followed by a motion to adjourn. The meeting adjourned at 3:18 pm.



Sidney M. Hopper, PhD
Secretary