

CENTRAL OFFICE
921 NE 23rd Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
Tel: (405) 239-7141
Fax: (405) 239-2430



EASTERN OFFICE
1115 West 17th St.
Tulsa, OK 74107
Tel: (918) 295-3400
Fax: (918) 585-1549

**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER
BOARD OF MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS**

**BOARD OF MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS
REGULAR MEETING**

Board Meeting Minutes from
Thursday February 2, 2023, at 2:00 p.m.
921 NE 23rd Street, Oklahoma City, OK 73105
and Via Videoconference

In conformity with the Oklahoma Open Meeting Act, advance notice of this meeting was transmitted to the Oklahoma Secretary of State on November 9, 2022, at 4:26 P.M. and public notice of this meeting, together with the agenda, was posted in prominent public view on the front door of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 921 NE 23rd Street, Oklahoma City, OK.

Members present: Ms. Andrea Fielding, Mr. Keith Reed, Mr. Tyler Stiles, Dr. Michael Magguilli, and Dr. Eric Pfeifer.

Members present via videoconference: Dr. Robert Allen, Dr. Eric Harp, and Dr. Doug Stewart.

Members absent: Ms. Angela Marsee

Others Present: Madalynn Martin (OAG), Kari Learned (OCME), Dr. Marc Harrison (OCME), Via videoconference, Dr. Josh Lanter (OCME).

Dr. Harp called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m. Roll was called and a quorum was established.

Mr. Reed motioned to adopt the minutes as written from November 3, 2022, meeting. Mr. Stiles seconded the motion. Roll was called, Dr. Allen, Ms. Fielding and Dr. Stewart abstained, all others were in favor.

- Update from the Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Eric Pfeifer

~ Dr. Pfeifer presented the agency update to the Board.

Dr. Pfeifer announced the overarching priority has been and continues to be NAME (National Association of Medical Examiners) reaccreditation. With the Tulsa practice location being completed the agency is moving toward the goal of reaccreditation.

We did not anticipate the caseload increase due to COVID-19. Historically, since 1965 the practice grew at about 11% per decade. During the 2 years of the pandemic, the caseload grew 25% and has not gone down.

The 3rd floor of the Oklahoma City building is currently a shell. We received a bid from the owner of the building for reconstructing that area to add 12 offices and a conference room. To their estimate we need to add furniture, fixtures, equipment, and information technology build out and provisioning. This would give us approximately 4700 square feet of added space. The agency is in a good position to receive federal funding through the Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) for this project.

A major project for the agency is a new case management system. The agency is currently using a 22-year-old system that was developed by an individual and is supported by our vendor who works alone. It is a Microsoft Access front end that transfers information to a SQL server. It is beginning to show its age and does not communicate with other platforms. For instance, electronic death registration with the OSHD, Division of Vital Records. We have participated in demonstrations from a few vendors. The exact cost of a new system is unknown at this time, however, we are estimating it to be approximately \$1.6M. OSDH has been a great help in providing assistance with the justification for this funding. We expect to hear from them soon advising us on the approval status.

Forensic staffing and recruitment –

As mentioned in our last meeting, the agency lost 3 forensic pathologists (FP) almost simultaneously. This was due to retirement and moving closer to family. We have recruited 2 pathologists who have an Oklahoma connection and are currently in Los Angeles, CA. They are both forensic pathology board certified. One has 2 years of radiology training and the other is currently training to become a neuropathologist. The negative side to this is they are 14 months away from joining the practice. We still have 2 open positions in the Tulsa practice that we are trying to fill.

Case turn-around time –

There is a slight increase in the open cases over 90 days old. Currently there are 893 open cases over 90 days old. This increase coincides with the departure of our 3 FP. We are working hard to get these cases completed and recruit additional FP staff to get these cases back down to an acceptable level.

Fellowship –

The fellowship program continues to be accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). An Instagram account was set up a few months ago that has developed a lot of interest. For the first time, the OCME fellowship has entered a residency match program. Over the last few months, we've interviewed 5 candidates. We should know the results of the match for the 2024-2025 academic year in early May.

Administration –

House and Senate budget hearings were attended at the capital last month. The most challenging aspect of the budget is determining how much money is needed to continue operations. An additional \$813K was requested for FY24 supplemental appropriation. This amount would fund an additional FTE

forensic pathologist, 4 investigators and allow for some modest salary adjustments to administrative personnel within the toxicology laboratory lab.

Anthropology –

Dr. Sara Getz joined the agency last month. She is fully certified by the American Board of Forensic Anthropology. With the large number of clandestine shallow graves in the state of Oklahoma, the agency would benefit from a fourth anthropologist. This will be a consideration for the budget request next year.

Autopsy services –

With the opening of the new Tulsa practice, the agency has 18 autopsy tables, 2 Lodox, and 2 CT scanners.

Information technology (IT) –

The State announced it's cancelled the contract with NTT. This is the group who provide state agencies with IT assistance.

We seem to be getting close to having the toxicology laboratory LIMS (Laboratory Information Management System) project completed.

The agency is working on acquiring a new case management system in the next couple of years.

Investigations –

This fiscal year we were given appropriations to hire 4 additional investigators. These new positions have been filled and we are looking are requesting 4 more next year. Scene response time average for the month of January was 1 hour 13 minutes. The only way to reduce this time is to add more investigators. We would like to get the average scene response time down to about an hour.

With assistance of Oklahoma City Police Department, OCME has formed a new wellness unit. Some employees can be adversely affected by the scenes they attend, particularly ones that involve children. This is a venue for OCME employees.

Permit turnaround time –

Permit turnaround time has decreased slightly to 12 hours 6 minutes. The goal is to have permits issued in 48 hours (2 business days) or less. We are doing well in this area.

Toxicology lab –

The toxicology lab recently hired a new forensic toxicologist. Dr. Angelica Harper came to us from the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration). She has been trained in our systems and has begun signing out cases. The lab also using the services of a contract toxicologists who is helping on some technical certifications on overdose cases.

Legislation –

We've spoken with Senator Paul Rosino regarding certifying deaths when physicians in the state refuse to sign. For instance, a family physician or an emergency room doctor refuse to sign the death certificate (DC). This leaves the families waiting because the doctors won't sign a DC, eventually the death

certificate ends up at the ME's office. Last year alone, OCME signed approximately 600 death certificates that were not within our jurisdiction. Due to the amount of time this activity requires, we would like to request another FP. This would be in addition to the FP we asked for in the current budget request.

Financial update –

The monthly carryover seems to have stabilized at approximately \$60K-\$70K. Earlier in the fiscal year we were still paying for equipment for the new Tulsa practice which included the CT scanner. The carryover must fund 3 forensic pathologist positions that we are waiting to fill. Once these positions are filled, the monthly carryover will be much less at roughly \$10-\$15K.

The present available cash is at \$9.8M. With this balance, we should be able to manage for a couple of years, however, this will eventually be exhausted.

Dr. Pfeifer shared a photo taken at the NAME conference in October 2022, showing the job boards with a vast number of forensic pathologist job postings. Currently, there are approximate 50 openings nationwide. Harris County, Texas and Charleston, South Carolina starting salaries with benefits are \$275K which is at our top salary range. The phenomenon that was recognized a few years ago in the south-eastern and south-western area of the United States is happening again. The competition is becoming very fierce for forensic pathologists and salaries are on the rise.

● Update from the Deputy Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Josh Lanter

The Tulsa office is in the 7th month of occupation of the new building, and we are 98% moved in. There are still a few items waiting to be received.

This week has seen a very heavy caseload running anywhere from 15-25 cases per day. Fifteen years ago, this was unheard of. With the new autopsy lab, there are no more bottleneck issues that were experienced in the previous building. We have seen positive changes, specifically in morale and the building has far exceeded their expectations.

The previous building is almost demolished at this point. During the next phase OSU (Oklahoma State University, Health Science Center) plans to turn the site into a green space and to create a restaurant in the area adjacent to the old office site.

Recently Tulsa has added 3 district investigators on the east side of the state. With this addition, each district will now have 3 investigators. This will help reduce the response time for investigators to arrive on scene on the eastern side of the state.

We received new fleet vehicles which should be in service soon. They are Ford Explorers which replace the Ford F150s.

- No new business.

Mr. Reed motioned to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Stewart seconded the motion. Roll was called and were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 2:28 pm.