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

**BOARD OF MEDICOLEGAL INVESTIGATIONS
REGULAR MEETING**

Board Meeting Minutes from
Thursday May 6, 2021 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 17, 2020 at 2:03 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, .

Members present: Mr. Rocky McElvany, Mr. Chris Ferguson, and Dr. Eric Pfeifer.

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

Members absent: Mr. Ricky Adams and Mr. Glen Huff

Others Present: Dr. Joshua Lanter (OCME), John Crittenden (OAG), Kari Learned (OCME), Lori Shively (OCME), Renee Steward (OCME), Dr. Jesse Kemp, (OCME), Jodi Dillon (OCME), Dr. Marc Harrison (OCME), and Tyler Stiles (Oklahoma Funeral Board) Tricia Everest (SPS) .

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

Mr. Ferguson motioned to adopt the minutes as written from April 1, 2021 meeting. Dr. Zhang seconded the motion. Roll was called and all were in favor.

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

Dr. Pfeifer introduced the new Secretary of Public Safety, Tricia Everest to the Board.

~ Dr. Pfeifer announced that he will begin providing the agency updates in a new format which he's adopted.

Financial snapshot –

The agency's March 2021 deposits were very strong at \$717K. This came from an increase in cremation permits that were issued during the peak of the COVID-19 virus. This type of revenue has been growing at 4-5% per year over the last 10 years.

The total expenditures are still within line; with a current carryover of approximately \$150-160K per month. This money is for the recruitment and retention of 4 additional physicians. Although the carryover is still strong, it is already incumbered. As of today, the available cash is \$11.96M. Approximately \$3M will immediately be going toward the new building in Tulsa. We also have the expense of the Tulsa CT scanner and the annual maintenance agreement which will total \$1M. As the Tulsa project nears its completion, the available cash will begin to diminish.

Physicians update –

In 2011 the agency only had 6 full time forensic pathologists and today we 12. We will be adding our current fellows, Dr. Celia Cobb and Dr. Rory Deol to the staff effective July 1, 2021. This addition will bring the total number of staff forensic pathologists to 14. We still need to recruit 2 more to meet the requirements for National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) reaccreditation. This does not include the 2 fellowship slots we have every year. When the agency is fully staffed, we will have 18 physicians to include the fellows.

Case data –

Data collected from May 3, 2021, indicates we currently have 325 open cases exceeding 90 days old. Dr. Pfeifer added that this number represents approximately 2 weeks of caseload in terms of the cases we see.

Case completion parameters –

In March, Dr. Pfeifer set a goal to have all cases that were open at the time the goal was established completed by August 2, 2021. After this date, we will be looking at NAME accreditation parameters to have 90% of cases signed out within 90 days. Next January, we would like to exceed that by having 90% cases signed out within 60 days.

Fellowship program –

Our fellowship program has been very successful. We are approved by the Accreditation Council for General Medical Education (ACGME) for 2 fellowship positions and recently received continued reaccreditation.

Administration –

We dissolved the position of Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and have reallocated those duties to 3 staff in the central office. Appropriate salary adjustments were made for these roles and responsibilities. Salary adjustments will also be made for the rest of administration in Oklahoma City and Tulsa over the next few weeks using the money save from the dissolution of that position. These increases will not require additional appropriation, as they are a redistribution of the CAO salary.

The Office of Management and Enterprise Services (OMES) has eliminated the Account Executive and IT Strategist positions across the board. Our agency was fortunate to have an OMES employee interested in being embedded in our office. This is someone who is familiar with how our agency operates and is

aware of our IT needs. We discussed acquiring this person with OMES, and this individual will join us June 1st as the IT Manager.

Toxicology –

In terms of caseload, our toxicology laboratory is one of the 10 busiest labs in the United States. We are on track to work over 6,000 cases this year, with approximately 85,000-90,000 assays. Outside the Tulsa project, the major expense for the agency is the Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) at a cost of \$358K. It has been a 5-year project to recognize which system the agency needed and to get it installed.

Dr. Jesse Kemp provided Dr. Pfeifer with a very detailed study of salary comparisons within the local region. During the next budget cycle Dr. Pfeifer will use this data and request pay increases for the chemists and toxicologists to keep the salaries competitive.

Autopsy Service –

It has been a number of years since the autopsy lab personnel have received a salary adjustment. Dr. Pfeifer will request pay increases for this department as well.

Steve Mullins and Renee Steward have been instrumental in getting the refrigerated trucks operational. These trucks were purchased 11 months ago, and we've experienced many issues with them. It has taken to this point to get them where they are reliable enough to deploy to a disaster site. Additionally, solar panels have been installed as power backup; stainless steel racks have been installed along with a compact scissor lift stays in the trucks.

Investigations –

Jodi Dillon provided Dr. Pfeifer with a packet of market data with salary evaluations. We will be requesting salary adjustments for investigators as well. New equipment has also been requested for the next budget year. The current fleet is aging and beginning to break down. Considering the investigators scene requirements, we are looking at replacing the vehicles with SUVs.

Permit turnaround time for April 2021 was 9 hours, 12 minutes. Our expectation is to have permits signed within 48 hours.

Scene response elapsed time average for April 2021 was 1 hour, 22 minutes. The goal is to keep this time as close to an hour as possible.

Legislative update –

Senate Bill 354 which would eliminate out of state transit permits from counties neighboring other states is currently dormant. However, there is a possibility the bill could be resurrected during the next legislative session. Dr. Pfeifer will keep a close watch on this.

Senate Bill 95 has been signed by the Governor. The bill requires the agency to provide a completed sudden unexplained infant death investigation (SUIDI) form to the Child Death Review Board. We anticipated the costs associated with this bill and were awarded the appropriations requested to cover the expense to the agency.

House Bill 2009 will allow nurse practitioners to sign death certificates. This bill may help our agency on non-jurisdiction cases where we are being asked to sign the death certificates. These death certificates might now be signed by a nurse practitioner.

Priority projects –

The National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) reaccreditation remains a top priority. We expect to invite the inspection team sometime in 2023; approximately 6 months after the Tulsa office is completed and commissioned for occupancy.

Construction on the Tulsa office is currently about 3 weeks behind schedule. Dr. Pfeifer is not concerned with this.

Dr. Allen asked if there are any NAME requirements regarding the approval of fellowship positions. If so, is there a minimum number that is acceptable for an organization this size? Dr. Pfeifer responded that NAME accreditation does not specify anything other than a fellow physician counts as half a staff physician when workload is calculated. The ACGME will look at a program's size, caseload and staffing to see how many fellow positions a program may have to properly train the fellows. Two years ago, we requested and were approved for an additional fellow bringing our program to two. Our case data would show that we could support 4 fellows, however, until we obtain reaccreditation, we will not request another increase.

Recently we've spoken with members of the Health Department regarding non-jurisdiction cases that are natural deaths with a physician in attendance. These are cases our office ordinarily would not be involved with. There is an increase where Oklahoma physician are unwilling or unable to sign the death certificates. In the past this wasn't an issue, however, the number has grown to approximately 1000 cases per year. This has become a burden on the agency staff. Medical records and other information must be obtained and reviewed then certify the death certificate. If we become responsible for this case load in the future, Dr. Pfeifer will be requesting an additional ½ FTE (full time equivalent) physician and more investigators. House Bill 2009 could be a solution to this and may take many of these off our hands. We will continue to meet with the Health Department, Medical Licensure Board and Oklahoma Medical Association to discuss a possible solution to have physicians sign these death certificates we shouldn't be signing.

We will be looking at credit card payment options for permit payments from funeral homes. Mr. Ferguson encouraged Dr. Pfeifer to look into this as it will be very beneficial to funeral homes.

Mr. Ferguson asked Dr. Pfeifer who will be responsible for legislation now that the Chief Administrative Officer position has been dissolved. Dr. Pfeifer said that parts have been reallocated to Renee Steward, Lori Shively and Kari Learned. Mr. Ferguson also asked if the agency subscribes to a legislative service. Mrs. Steward confirmed that the agency does. He also suggested we reach out to the agency's cabinet secretary.

Mr. Ferguson asked if all investigator positions are filled. Dr. Pfeifer responded that there may be a couple of vacancies in the eastern districts. Ultimately, Dr. Pfeifer would like to see the agency have

more investigators. The model would be to have 1 investigator per 100K people in the state. Taking this into consideration, and with the most recent census data we would need 40 investigators where we currently have 30.

Dr. Pfeifer described the GeoSafe program the investigators recently started using. This determines which investigator is closest to a scene and the program has cut down on response time and seems to be working well.

Mr. Ferguson asked if everyone is back to work. Dr. Pfeifer said that the agency has a hybrid work environment. He said he has not seen a drop in efficiency and moral is very high.

Mr. Ferguson motioned to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Zhang seconded the motion. Roll was called and were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm.