



Medical Examiner Department Business Plan

Fiscal Years: 2024 and 2025*
(10/1/2023 through 9/30/2025)

Approved by:

Handwritten signature of Kenneth D. Hutchins, M.D. in black ink.

Kenneth D. Hutchins, M.D.
Department Director

Date

7-12-2024

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J.D. Patterson
Chief of Preparedness and Forensics

Date

7/12/2024

Plan Date: July 12, 2024

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DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Department Mission

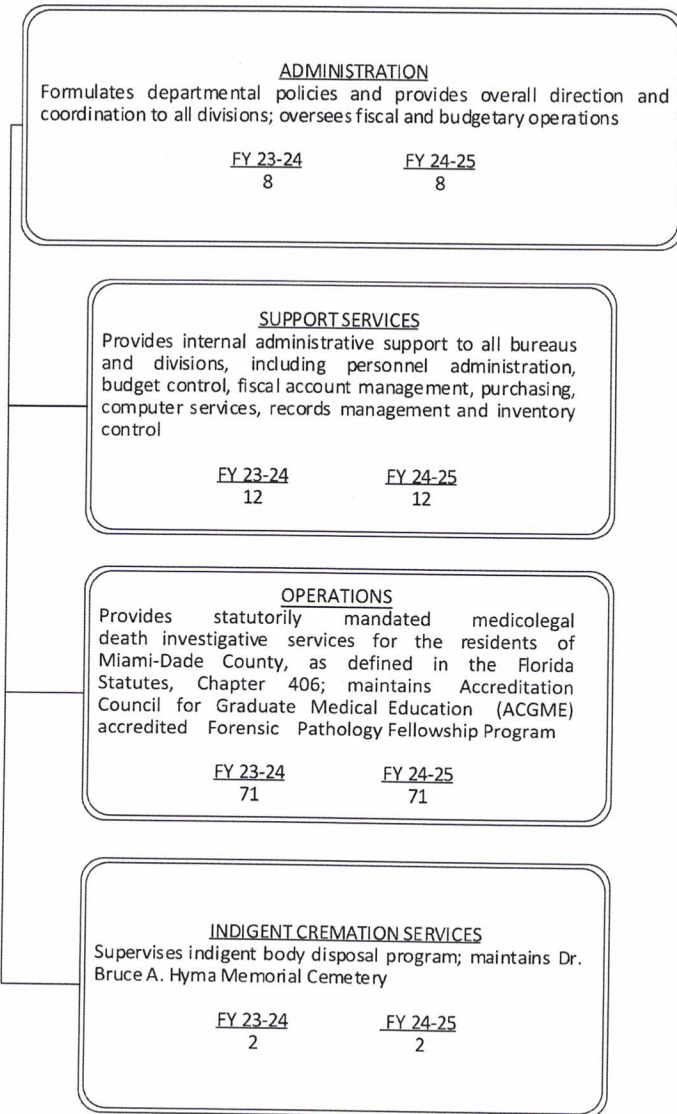
The mission of the Medical Examiner Department (Department) is to provide accurate, timely, dignified, compassionate and professional forensic pathological death investigative services for the residents of Miami-Dade County (County), together with education, consultation, and research for local and national medical, legal, academic, and law enforcement communities.

The Department exists to provide statutorily mandated medicolegal death investigative services for the residents of the County. The work of the Department focuses on what is generally termed “forensic pathology”. This field of work combines the efforts of legal and law enforcement investigations with those of medicine and science to ascertain the facts surrounding deaths, particularly the cause and manner of death, as defined in Florida Statute, Chapter 406. This mandate translates into a workload of investigating nearly 16,000 deaths annually. Forensic medical and toxicological consultation services, education, and research further define the department’s mission. Apart from our core mission, the Department directs the County’s Indigent Cremation Services (ICS). The County’s ICS provides low-cost disposition for abandoned, unclaimed human remains and for deceased members of indigent County families.

The Department interrelates with many local, state, and federal agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), State Attorney’s and Public Defender’s Offices, Life Alliance Organ Procurement, Legacy Donor Services Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, law enforcement agencies, medical offices and hospitals, funeral homes, and the media. The Department currently has 93 full-time positions in its various bureaus, which include: The Director’s Office, Deputy Director’s Office, Pathology/Histology, Toxicology, Administrative Services, Investigations, and Operations. Within Administrative Services are the Budget and Finance Office, Information Technology, Human Resources, Procurement, and Records Bureaus. Within Investigative Services are Investigations and ICS Bureaus. Within Operations are the Morgue, Photography, and Forensic Evidence Recovery Bureaus.



Table of Organization



The FY 2024-25 total number of full-time equivalent positions is 93



Our Customers

The Department provides statutorily mandated medicolegal death investigative services for County residents. In cooperation with various local law enforcement agencies, the Department uses the tools of medicine and science to ascertain the facts surrounding deaths to determine the cause and manner of death as defined in Florida Statute, Chapter 406.

The specialized nature of the Department’s work guarantees a restricted and specialized customer/market base. Since death is not bound by social, economic, political, or legal parameters, the department serves a diverse group of customers with various expectations.

For the most part, our customers are drawn to us by virtue of the decedents who are brought to our facility for investigation and certification. The most personal services are those provided to bereaved next-of-kin who call and visit the department daily to seek information and assistance. Each decedent draws an investigating police agency contingent on the jurisdiction in which the death occurs, and each decedent will be followed by family members. The Medical Examiner Department serves a variety of internal stakeholders including the Office of the Mayor, the Board of County Commissioners, other elected officials, county departments, and agencies. As a government agency established by state statute and funded by public dollars, we have a clearly defined external customer base that we engage:

External Customers	Needs
Bereaved families	Prompt release of remains, sensitivity, professionalism
Funeral homes	Prompt release of remains; clear, accurate death certificate
Law enforcement	Prompt response to crime scenes, professional cooperation
Judicial System	Accurate death investigative information
Private Industry and Media	Prompt release of public records information
Federal, State, and County Governments	Adherence to County ordinances, rules, regulations, and directives
Hospitals, nursing homes, and assisted living facilities	Prompt response, professional cooperation

Each year, the Department promotes professional community engagement by hosting forensic seminars, such as the Medicolegal Death Investigation and International Forensic Photography Workshops. These seminars draw professionals and students from across the country and abroad.

Every three years, the Florida Medical Examiner Commission conducts customer satisfaction surveys of all the customers listed above and provides feedback to the Chief Medical Examiner.

The Department services the residents of the County, many local, state, and federal agencies, including the FBI, NTSB, FAA, State Attorney’s and Public Defender’s Offices, Life Alliance Organ Procurement, Legacy Donor Services Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, insurance companies, private not-for-profit organizations, law enforcement departments, medical offices, hospitals, funeral homes, and the media.



Strategic Alignment, 4E, and Thrive305 Summary

The Department's mission aligns with the following County Strategic Plan Goals:

PS1-2: Solve crimes quickly, accurately, and in an unbiased manner (Engagement)

- Maintain timely evidence collection and investigative services, completion of autopsy protocols, and pending cases, toxicological and histopathological analysis as well as body disposition approvals in accordance with the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) accreditation.
- Review and process the County's unidentified decedents through the Federal DNA Initiative National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and National Missing and Unidentified Persons Systems (NamUs.org).
- Provide quality, relevant, and professional training programs.
- Maintain death scene investigative services by certified medicolegal death investigators and medical examiners.
- Continue to repair and/or recapitalize aging equipment to ensure a timely, accurate, and consistent level of quality service to the County, our partners, and our customers.

PS-2: Minimize response time (Equity)

- Improve Forensic Evidence Recovery Team (FERT) response time.
- Identify new drugs of abuse and chemicals in the community that present potential public health problems that may result in death.
- Improve the delivery of services to the community, promoting equity, through reduction in the time to complete autopsies and external examinations.

GG2-1: Attract and hire new talent to support operations (Equity)

- Support and maintain competitive employee compensation and benefit packages.
- Hire and Train qualified pathologists (4) annually in the ACGME-accredited Forensic Pathology Fellowship program. This program provides service delivery to the department and is a consistent, reliable source of quality medical examiners.

GG2-2: Promote employee development and leadership

- Support and maintain required professional certification for the histology technician, toxicologists, forensic photographers, and medicolegal death investigators.
- Renew accreditation with Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.
- Provide certified training for Forensic Evidence Recovery Technicians on conducting scene investigations. Train qualified dentists through the contractual services of the department's forensic odontologist.



Strategic Alignment, 4E, and Thrive305 Summary (continued)

GG3-2: Ensure security of systems and data

- Purchase specialized advanced analytical instrumentation to identify and measure newly emerging drugs of abuse and toxins.
- Maintain and facilitate coordination of unidentified decedents and missing persons; and review and process the County's unidentified decedents through the Federal DNA initiative (NCIC and NamUs.org).
- Convert to paperless department with secure and efficient archiving solutions.
- Improve internal chain of custody tracking systems.
- Develop and implement IT solutions to streamline business operations and improve our service to the County, our partners, and our customers.

GG3-4: Effectively utilize and maintain facilities and assets (Environment)

- Replace the aging audio-visual system in the auditorium to ensure that our revenue-generating seminars continue to meet the highest educational and training standards.
- Plan, estimate cost, integrate, and execute complex cross-departmental infrastructure upgrades for the morgue, histology, and toxicology areas.
- Implement pilot program to test electric vehicle for potential complete replacement of aging fleet to minimize air pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

GG4-2: Effectively prioritize, allocate, and use resources to meet the current and future operating and capital needs for all our residents (Engagement)

- Amplify existing capacity for the department-wide network storage areas and backup strategies.
- Implement a Family Advocate Program: The role of the Family Advocate will be to provide resources information to educate family members on what is to be expected as it relates to the passing of a loved one. This includes communicating with families the services offered by our department as well as available external resources. They will provide support to the Medical Examiner Investigator and Medical Examiner and assist with authorized viewings and chaplain services when requested by the family. Additionally, they will serve as liaison between the family, community, law enforcement, and funeral homes, coordinating with them and other entities such as the fire department and the mayor's office in cases of in-the-line-of-duty related deaths. They will be on-call to provide after-hour services at various death locations when needed to assist the family at the request of the Medical Examiner or Medical Examiner Investigator. They will adhere to the department's policies to render expedited services including those involving religious beliefs. Their ancillary duties will include but are not limited to answering queries, providing education to family members on the cause and manner of deaths and creating accessible pathways for family members with questions or concerns. They will also assist the Veterans Affairs Office.



Measure Alignment to 4E-Thrive305

Selected Measure Name	4E (Environment, Equity, Economy, or Engagement)	Thrive 305 Priority or Action
Crime scene investigations conducted	Engagement	Action 1.3
Death investigations conducted	Engagement	Action 1.3
Body Count in Refrigerated Storage	Engagement	N/A
Turnaround time for religious objection to autopsy	Engagement	N/A

KEY ISSUES

1. Critical to the Department’s mission is to obtain sufficient operational and capital funding to:
 - a. Attract and retain quality employees.
 - b. Address the increasing demands and the department's need for additional space because of Miami-Dade County's growing population to:
 - i. Ensure compliance with the latest laws, rules, and regulations to meet our statutory obligations to the County residents, law enforcement, the judiciary, the State of Florida, private industry, and the medical and legal communities.
 - ii. Meet and maintain National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI), and American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) accreditation and certification standards.
 - iii. Utilize office space efficiently to meet current and future operational, investigative, toxicological, and histology needs to address continuous, emerging investigative challenges.
 - iv. Provide in-house and off-site training and educational opportunities for departmental staff to meet emerging investigative challenges.
 - v. Maintain readiness to meet current and future technology demands through replacement of the Coroners’ Medical Examiner system and laboratory information software with a Case Management Enterprise (CME) system and a Laboratory Information Management system (LIMS) to include security, connectivity, and compatibility with the County network infrastructure.
 - vi. Recapitalize equipment that has exceeded its natural life span.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES

- Coordinate with the Human Resources Department to conduct salary equity analysis to recruit and fill vacancies with highly qualified personnel.
- Maintain accreditation and certification by NAME, ACGME, ABMDI, and ABFT.
- Collaborate with the Internal Services Department (ISD) to integrate and execute complex multi-departmental projects infrastructure upgrades and major renovations for our morgue, toxicology, and histology areas.



Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: Medical Examiner

FY2023-24 & FY2024-25

- Replace the existing Coroners' Medical Examiner system and laboratory information software that will reach end of life after October 14, 2025, and no longer vendor supported.
- Replace the Department's aging vehicle fleet to ensure response capability for forensic evidence recovery and investigative services.
- Collaborate with ISD to repair and/or replace deteriorating and/or obsolete aspects of our 35-year-old Medical Examiner facility.
- Allocate funding for training to further staff development and enhance death investigative effectiveness.
- Update and expand the Department's policies and procedures to enhance staff development, departmental quality control, and ensure compliance with statutory requirements.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

The top priority of the Department is to maintain personnel and operating funding sources to provide the proper service levels. As the state Medical Examiner Commission mandates, the Department will complete the review and processing of all County unidentified decedents through the Federal DNA Initiative and maintain current data in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (www.NamUs.org). Disaster and mass casualty preparedness will be a continuing challenge as we restore and train staff while moving forward with integrating data management software through Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System (FEMORS). As time and our limited budget permits, the Department desires to accomplish the following in the next three to five years:

- a. Focus on identifying and expanding opportunities for community engagement to educate the public about death investigative services. This will be achieved through planning and managed growth to include a review of the Department's business processes, acquiring new technologies, expanding social media presence, and redistributing functions within the Department.
- b. Renew and maintain accreditation and certification by NAME, ACGME, ABMDI, and ABFT.
- c. Increase operational staff to further develop the Fellowship Program, implement a patient safety program, and increase scholarly research, as well as effectively manage the increased workload brought on by external factors (increased volume of residents and visitors).
- d. Continue a multi-year plan to convert all existing Medical Examiner case files into a state certified, digital database.
- e. Replace the Department's aging fleet to ensure response capability for forensic evidence recovery and investigative services.
- f. Develop long-term, sustainable solution to ensure and enhance the current enterprise Information Technology (IT)/Coroner/Medical Examiner Data System is fully compatible with the INFORMs project and that it provides tailored, dependable support to operations amidst changing trends in IT security and interoperability.



Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: Medical Examiner

FY2023-24 & FY2024-25

- g. Continue to develop and implement IT solutions to streamline business operations and improve our service to the County, our partners, and our customers.
- h. Replace the audio-visual system to resume holding national workshops, trainings, and seminars with our local partners and law enforcement agencies.
- i. Renovate the toxicology, histology, and morgue suites to better align with service demands, instrument workflow, and hazardous material safety storage requirements.
- j. Modernize and beautify the Medical Examiner facility. The facility is 35 years old and most of its décor (carpet, flooring, furniture, wall covering, etc.) has not been replaced in nearly two decades.

ATTACHMENT 1

BUSINESS PLAN REPORT



Medical Examiner Department

The mission of the Medical Examiner Department is to provide accurate, timely, dignified, compassionate and professional death investigative services for the citizens of Miami-Dade County, together with education, consultation and research for local and national medical, legal, academic and law enforcement communities.

Owner: Hutchins, Kenneth (ME)
Department: Medical Examiner

Perspective Name	Objective Name	Measure Name	Last Period Updated		Actual	Target	Actual FYTD	FYTD Goal	
Customer	Maintain all available certifications in order to provide professional service in support of Statutory Mandate (FS Chapter 406)	Percent of Staff Doctors Meeting Case Load (NAME Accreditation) Guidelines	2023 FY	🔴	33%	100%	33%	100%	🔴
		Percent Staff Pathologist Meeting FAME Autopsy Case Load Guidelines	2023 FY	🟢	67%	100%	67%	100%	🟢
		National Association of Medical Examiners - Performance Measure: Percentage of all death investigations performed by the department that are certified as to cause and manner of death within 90 days.	May '24	🟡	89%	90%	88%	90%	🟡
		National Association of Medical Examiners - Performance Measure: Percent of all death investigations performed by the department that are certified as to cause and manner of death within 60 days.	May '24	🟡	83%	90%	82%	90%	🟡
		National Association of Medical Examiners - Performance Measure: Are 90% of autopsies and external examinations performed within 72 hours from the time that medical examiner jurisdiction is accepted or coroner's authorization is granted, or within 72 hour	May '24	🟡	100	90	99	90	🟡
		National Association of Medical Examiners - Performance Measure: Are 90% of autopsies and external examinations performed within 48 hours from the time that medical examiner jurisdiction is accepted or coroner's authorization is granted, or within 48 hour	May '24	🟡	99	90	97	90	🟡
	Provide timely service to meet certification standards and/or support Statutory Mandate (FS Chapter 406)	Autopsy protocol preparation time (calendar days)	Apr '24	🟢	7	14	16	14	🟡
		FERT - Average Arrival Response Time (Minutes) PS 2-1	May '24	🟢	56	60	60	60	🟢
		90 % of autopsies or external examinations performed with religious objections within twenty-four hours (Engagement) PS 2-1	May '24	🔴	77	90	74	90	🔴
	Provide accurate service in support of Statutory Mandate (FS Chapter 406)	Toxicology Case Turnaround Time (in days)	Jun '24	🟡	62	35	46	35	🟡
		Indigent Cremation Service Cases processed Annually (Fiscal Year)	2024 FY	🔴	422	860	422	860	🔴
		Crime Scene Investigations Conducted by Medical Examiners (Engagement)	2024 FY	🟢	47	101	47	101	🟢
		Body Count in Refrigerated Storage (Engagement)	Apr '24	🔴	150	125	173	125	🔴
	Financial	Meet Budget Targets (Medical Examiner)	Expen: Total (Medical Examiner)	'24 FQ2	🟢	\$3,616K	\$4,463K	\$7,489K	\$8,925K
Revenue: Total (Medical Examiner)			'24 FQ2	🔴	\$238K	\$4,463K	\$451K	\$8,925K	🔴
Positions: Full-Time Filled (ME)			'24 FQ2	🔴	82	93	n/a	n/a	🔴
Internal	Accurately monitor current activity and estimate future service demand.	Toxicology Case Requests Processed (ME District 11, Miami-Dade)	Jun '24	🟡	136	220	1,552	1,980	🟡
		Deaths Certified Annually (Autopsies, External Examinations, Skeletal Examinations and Telephone Cases) PS 1-2	2023 FY	🟢	2,735	3,029	2,735	3,029	🟢
		Body Disposition Requests Processed /Approved per Florida Statute	2023 FY	🟢	11,924	9,666	11,924	9,666	🟢
		Death Investigations Conducted - Fiscal Year PS 1-2 (Engagement)	2023 FY	🟢	15,912	17,823	15,912	17,823	🟢

Perspective Name	Objective Name	Measure Name	Last Period Updated		Actual	Target	Actual FYTD	FYTD Goal	
Internal	Accurately monitor current activity and estimate future service demand.	Autopsies Performed Annually (Fiscal) PS 1-2	2023 FY	▼	1,889	1,857	1,889	1,857	▼
		Toxicology Tests (Assays) Performed on MDME cases	2024 FY	▼	5,382	13,000	5,382	13,000	▼

[Edit Scorecard](#)

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Key: ♦ - Initiative ✦ - Featured Objective

Initiatives for Scorecard

Initiative	As Of	Status	Budget	Timing	Owners
Morgue Renovation					Hutchins, Kenneth (ME)
Digital Camera Kits					Wolf, Leonard (ME)
Case Management and Laboratory Information Software System					Rivera-Morales, Jorge (ME)
Histology Renovation					Hutchins, Kenneth (ME)
Stretcher Replacement					Garner, LaTishia (ME)
Morgue Cooler - Shelves Replacement					Garner, LaTishia (ME)
Alternative Light Source System					Wolf, Leonard (ME)
Morgue Cooler - Autopsy Tray Replacement					Garner, LaTishia (ME)
Toxicology Renovation					Hutchins, Kenneth (ME)
Audio Visual System					Rivera-Morales, Jorge (ME)

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Name contains any Medical Examiner Department