



## Prosecuting Attorney - Coroner 00100.843.

### Mission Statement

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To accurately determine the cause, manner, and mechanism of death for all cases that fall under the jurisdiction of the coroner by conducting the highest level of professional medico legal death investigation services.

### Function

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The coroner is responsible for investigating and certifying the manner and cause of death for certain types of death occurring within the county. The coroner relies on assistance from law enforcement, doctors, medical staff, hospice workers, forensic pathologists, forensic anthropologists, forensic odontologists, regional medical examiners, investigators, family members, biohazard and crime scene clean up companies, and next of kin to accomplish this work.

### Trends/Events

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#### Trends

- As the county's population increases, and with changes in societal behaviors, there have been more calls for service on an annual basis. In 2013, there were 201 deaths reported to the coroner's office and jurisdiction was invoked on 66. In 2022, there were 331 cases reported to the office and jurisdiction was invoked on 70 of them.
- Overdose deaths have been trending upwards over the last 10 years but spiked sharply in 2021 with 34 total overdose deaths. This doubled the previous 10-year high set in 2016. Overdose deaths decreased slightly in 2022 with 28 total but was still significantly higher than previous years. Overdose deaths have increased in the first 6 months of 2023 and the county is on pace to surpass 2021's numbers.
- Suicides deaths decreased slightly in 2022 but the overall trend is increasing. Total suicide deaths for 2023 (14 through July) are on pace to surpass 2021 (20) and 2022 (17).
- Accidental deaths (excluding drug overdoses) are increasing and the county is on pace to set a new 10 year high.
- Increasingly complex death scenes are requiring more time spent out of the office and on scene assisting with death investigations.

#### Events (first six months of 2023)

- Coordinated 27 autopsies - 25 of those autopsies with the Thurston County Coroner's Office and
- Hired an additional full time death investigator to assist with the ever-increasing caseload of the Coroner's Division.
- Increased the number of scene responses for more thorough death investigations.

- Began assisting on autopsies, when possible, to alleviate the shortage of forensic autopsy technicians and maintain existing skill sets.
- Took over investigating and processing indigent remains claim packets from the Human Resources Department.

## Goals

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- Continue to increase our presence at death scenes for more thorough death investigations.
- Continue to assist on autopsies, when possible, to help with the shortage of forensic autopsy technicians and maintain existing skill sets.
- Hire part time Deputy Coroner Death Investigator to receive and respond to death calls during non-business hours. Funds have been allocated for this purpose, but the position has not yet been posted or filled.
- Procure a vehicle for body transportation to enhance service levels to the public, maximize employee safety, and reduce reliance on third party providers.
- Obtain a cooler unit for body storage to reduce our reliance on third party providers for body storage.
- Obtain certification for all Deputy Coroner's by attending the state Basic Death Investigation course in September 2023.
- Collaborate with community stakeholders to identify and respond to issues and concerns related to death investigations.
- Continue the process for monitoring and reporting statistics to public health disciplines and the public using MDI-Log.
- Participate in all county Emergency Management Meetings that involve the work of the Coroner's Office.
- Continue preparing a mass casualty deployment plan for use in connection with a natural or man-made disaster.
- Develop and/or update policies and procedures, as necessary, to achieve accreditation.

## Challenges

- Limited availability of forensic pathologists and forensic autopsy technicians creates a challenge in scheduling autopsies and now necessitate autopsies to be hosted out-of-county.
- The lack of a coroner vehicle and cooler requires the division to rely on third party providers for transportation and body storage at significant cost to the county.
- Relying on third party providers complicates scheduling autopsies as they must be coordinated between the Coroner's Office, the forensic pathologist, the autopsy facility, and other third party providers.

## Workload Indicators

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	2021 Actual	2022 Actual	6/30/23 Actual
Total Coroner Cases	321	331	168
Autopsies	87	52	27

No Autopsies	234	279	141
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## Grant Funding Sources

This fund does not receive any grant revenue. State reimburses 40% of pathologist costs for autopsies. The state reimburses 100% of costs relative to the death of a child under 3 years of age.

RCW 68.50.104 Cost of Autopsy - (1) The cost of autopsy shall be borne by the county in which the autopsy is performed, except when requested by the department of labor and industries, in which case, the department shall bear the cost of such autopsy.

(2)(a) Except as provided in (b) of this subsection, when the county bears the cost of an autopsy, it shall be reimbursed from the death investigations account, established by RCW 43.79.445, as follows:

(i) Up to forty percent of the cost of contracting for the services of a pathologist to perform an autopsy;

(ii) Up to 30 percent of the salary of pathologists who are primarily engaged in performing autopsies and are (A) county coroners or county medical examiners, or (B) employees of a county coroner or county medical examiner; and

(iii) One hundred percent of the cost of autopsies conducted under RCW 70.54.450. (iv) Up to 40 percent of the cost of transportation of remains to and from facilities accredited pursuant to RCW 36.24.210 for the purpose of autopsy services.

(b) When the county bears the cost of an autopsy of a child under the age of three whose death was sudden and unexplained, the county shall be reimbursed for the expenses of the autopsy when the death scene investigation and the autopsy have been conducted under RCW 43.103.100 (4) and (5), and the autopsy has been done at a facility designed for the performance of autopsies.

(3) Payments from the account shall be made pursuant to biennial appropriation: PROVIDED, That no county may reduce funds appropriated for this purpose below 1983 budgeted levels.

(4) Where the county coroner's office or county medical examiner's office is not accredited pursuant to RCW 36.24.210, or a coroner, medical examiner, or other medicolegal investigative employee is not certified as required by RCW 36.24.205 and 43.101.480, the state treasurer's office shall withhold 25 percent of autopsy reimbursement funds until accreditation under RCW 36.24.210 or compliance with RCW 36.24.205 and 43.101.480 is achieved.

## Revenues

	2021 Actual	2022 Actual	6/30/23 Actual	2024 Budget
Taxes	0	0	0	0
Licenses and Permits	0	0	0	0
Intergovernmental Revenues	47,040	43,960	17,360	40,000
Charges for Goods and Services	0	0	0	0
Fines and Forfeits	0	0	0	0
Miscellaneous Revenues	0	1,441	0	1
Other Financing Sources	0	0	0	0
Transfers In	0	0	0	0

General Tax Support	153,350	224,318	152,241	415,005
Total	200,390	269,719	169,601	455,006

## Expenditures

	2021 Actual	2022 Actual	6/30/23 Actual	2024 Budget
Salaries and Wages	0	33,361	39,174	180,068
Personnel Benefits	0	12,837	15,670	67,838
Supplies	0	15,206	6,454	10,000
Other Services and Charges	200,390	208,315	108,303	197,100
Intergovernmental Services	0	0	0	0
Capital Outlays	0	0	0	0
Interfund Payments for Services	0	0	0	0
Transfers Out	0	0	0	0
Total	200,390	269,719	169,601	455,006

## Staffing

	2021 Budget	2022 Budget	2023 Budget	2024 Budget
Full Time Equivalents	0.00	1.00	1.00	2.00