



# DANE COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

PUBLIC PROTECTION AND JUDICIARY COMMITTEE MEETING  
JUNE 18, 2024

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# Dane County Medical Examiner's Office

## Welcome

The death of a loved one can cause tremendous stress and sorrow. We hope this website will assist everyone involved in the process to answer some questions about the process, including the autopsy and the role of the Medical Examiner. If we can be of any assistance, please [contact us](#). Our normal business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday. Keep in mind that we staff the office 24/7, 365 days a year if you need assistance outside of normal business hours.

## Our Mission

To determine the circumstances, manner, and cause of all violent, sudden, unexpected, or unusual deaths occurring within Dane County. The Dane County Medical Examiner's Office is committed to maintaining the highest professional standards in the field of death investigation.



# Jurisdiction

- ◉ WI State Statutes Chapter 979 Investigation of Death
- ◉ WI State Statutes Chapter 157 Disposition of Human Remains
- ◉ Health and Family Services 135 Human Corpses and Stillbirths
- ◉ WI State Statutes Chapter 69 Collection of Statistics
- ◉ WI State Statutes Chapter 350

# Role of the C/ME

- ◎ To investigate and determine the cause of a death
- ◎ To investigate and determine the manner of a death
- ◎ To issue a certificate of death
- ◎ To issue permits for cremation, embalming, re-interment



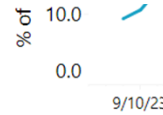
"... and I would have gotten away with it if it weren't for you meddling forensic pathologists."

# Role of

- Gather v
  - Violence
  - Death sta
- Public health
  - Initial HIV
  - Legionnaires
  - Influenza surveilla
- Consu
  - Ch
  - Nik
  - Co
- Mass
- Tissue Donation

Persons using assistive technology might not be able to fully access information in the title of the report in the subject line of e-mail.

## Death of a Child After Inge



## Uniform Anatomical Gift Act; 1998:

- All hospitals must have a relationship with an Organ Procurement Organization (OPO)
- Allows families to make *informed* decision at the end of life



### Emergency Support

- Agriculture s
- All-hazard p
- Behavioral h
- Public health
- Vector contr
- Potable wat
- Mass fatality
- Veterinary r

### Policies

Mortality Dashboard

Technical Notes

...is, both provided by the city's water system and routinely treated to kill the bacteria.

# Coroner vs. Medical Examiner

- ◎ An official charged by law with the jurisdiction and obligation to investigate the cause and manner of death
  - Coroner – elected official
  - Medical Examiner – an appointed official
- ◎ Both are also charged with certification of non-natural deaths

# Origins of the Coroner System

- ◎ English common law
- ◎ Coroner = “of the crown”
- ◎ Public official sent to represent the King
  - Investigate a death
  - Determine if a crime was committed
  - Collect proper taxes, arbitrate disputes, hold “court”
    - Similar to a modern “inquest”

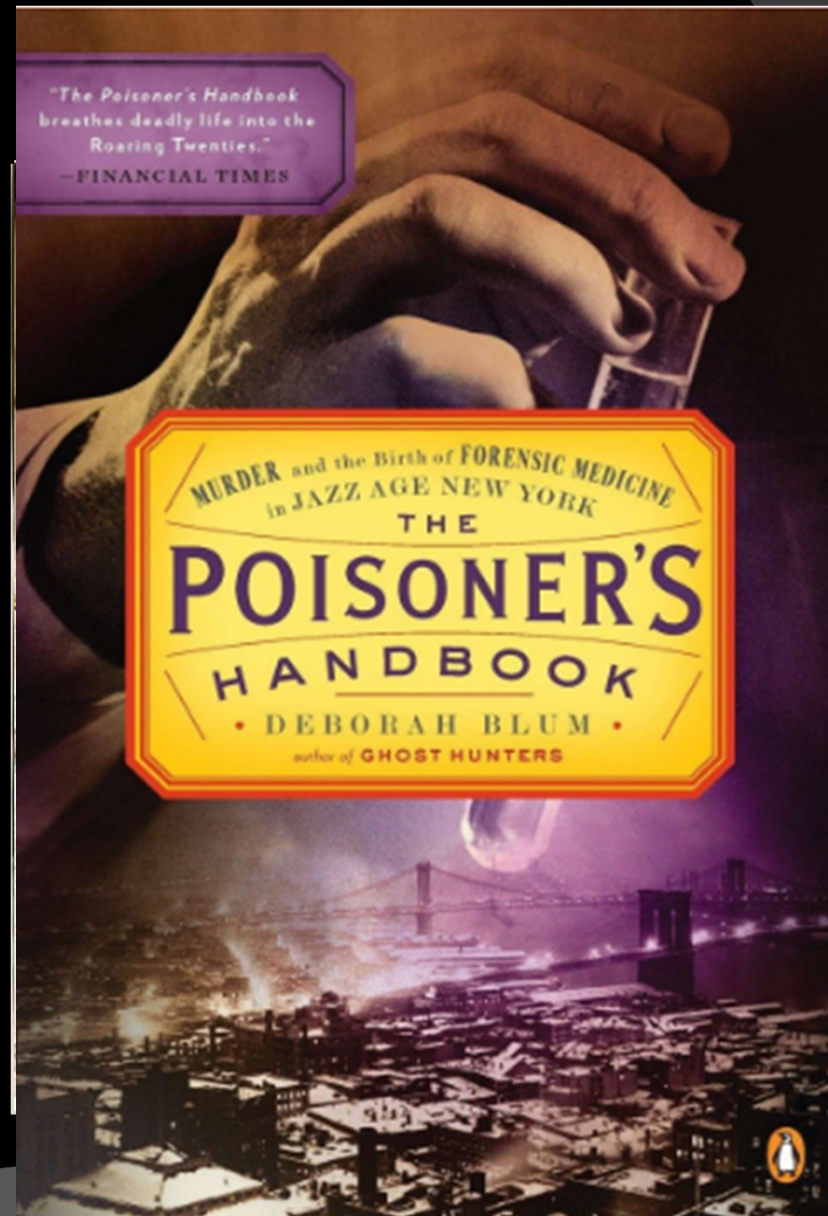
# Coroner System in the U.S.

- ◎ Elected position (generally a 4 year term)
- ◎ A coroner is a government official whose standard role is to confirm and certify the death of an individual within a jurisdiction
- ◎ A coroner may also conduct or order an inquest into the manner or cause of death, and investigate or confirm the identity of an unknown person who has been found dead within the coroner's jurisdiction



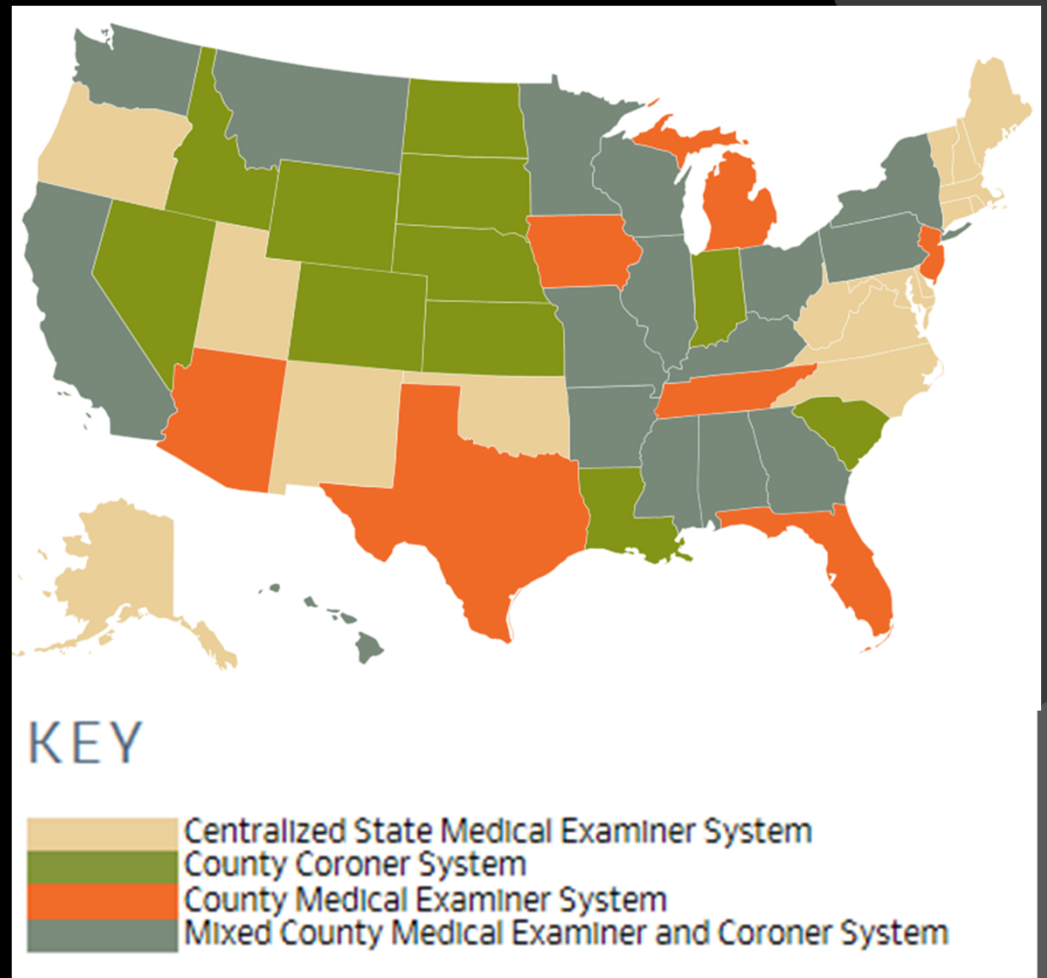
# The First Medical Examiner – Charles Norris

- ◎ New York, 1918
- ◎ *Reluctantly* appointed by following public outcry over failings of the coroner system
  - Lack of scientific training
  - Political favoritism
  - Drunkenness
  - Egregious errors of fact
- ◎ First trained pathologist to investigate the cause and manner of death



# Coroner/ Medical Examiner System in the U.S.

- Most states MIXED coroner/medical examiner
- Most change occurred between 1960-1981
- One county reverted to a Sheriff-Coroner system
- Shortage of trained pathologist (1,500 needed)



# Medical Examiner in Wisconsin

- ⦿ Appointed position
- ⦿ Mandatory when population reached 700,000\*

\* Mandatory at 500,000 at time of Dane County's implementation

- ⦿ As for the coroner, there are no training requirements for the lay Medical Examiner or Deputies

# Why do you need a Forensic Pathologist?

Strengthening Forensic Science in the United States: A Path Forward  
<http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12589.html>

## STRENGTHENING FORENSIC SCIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

A PATH FORWARD

Committee on Identifying the Needs of the Forensic Science Community

Committee on Science, Technology, and Law  
Policy and Global Affairs

Committee on Applied and Theoretical Statistics  
Division on Engineering and Physical Sciences

NATIONAL RESEARCH COUNCIL  
OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES

The disconnect between the determination a medical professional may make regarding the cause and manner of death and what the coroner may independently decide and certify as the cause and manner of death remains the weakest link in the process.

# What is a Forensic Pathologist?

- Medical professional with a M.D./D.O.
- Residency in Anatomic Pathology or Anatomic and Clinical Pathology
- Fellowship in Forensic Pathology
- Board Certified by the American Board of Pathology



## THE AMERICAN BOARD OF PATHOLOGY

A Member Board of the American Board of Medical Specialties

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# Wisconsin Coroners and Medical Examiners

## April 2024

+ Denotes current president of the Wisconsin Coroner/Medical Examiner Association



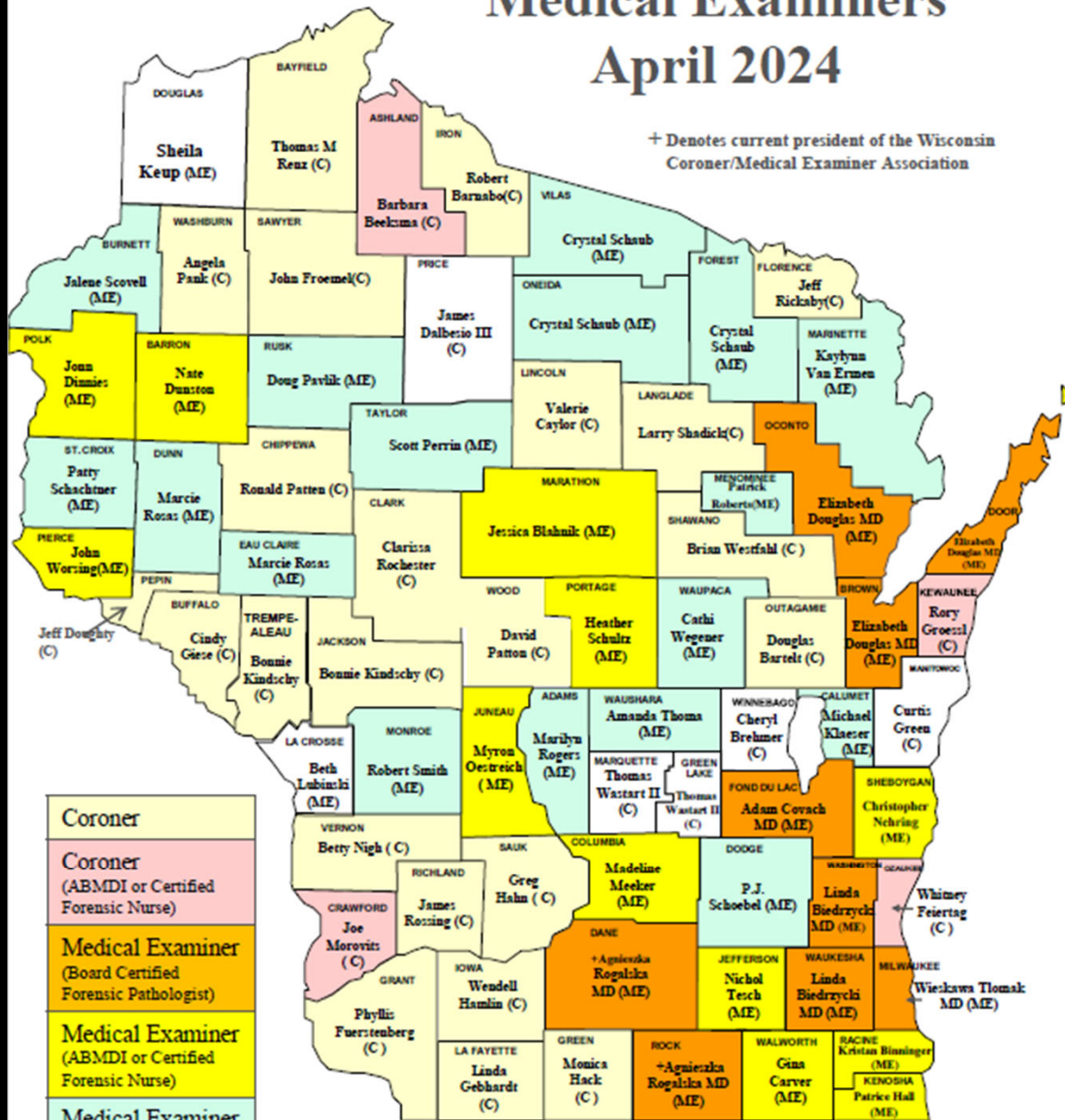
|  |
|--|
| Coroner  |
| Coroner<br>(ABMDI or Certified Forensic Nurse)             |
| Medical Examiner<br>(Board Certified Forensic Pathologist) |
| Medical Examiner<br>(ABMDI or Certified Forensic Nurse)    |
| Medical Examiner   |
| Coroner Physician  |

ABMDI = Certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators

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|---|
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| Medical Examiner  |
| Coroner Physician                                       |

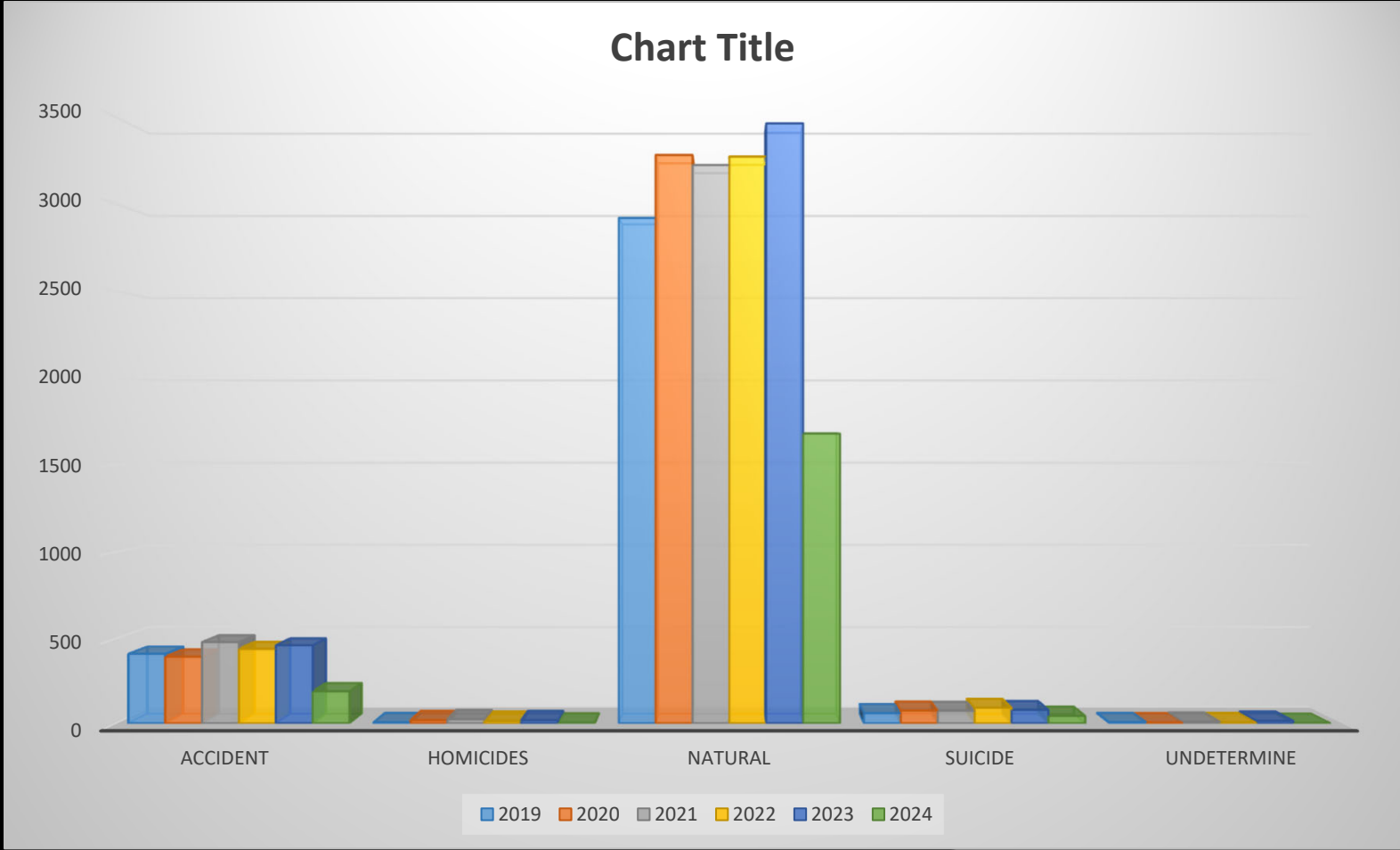
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# Other Referral Autopsies

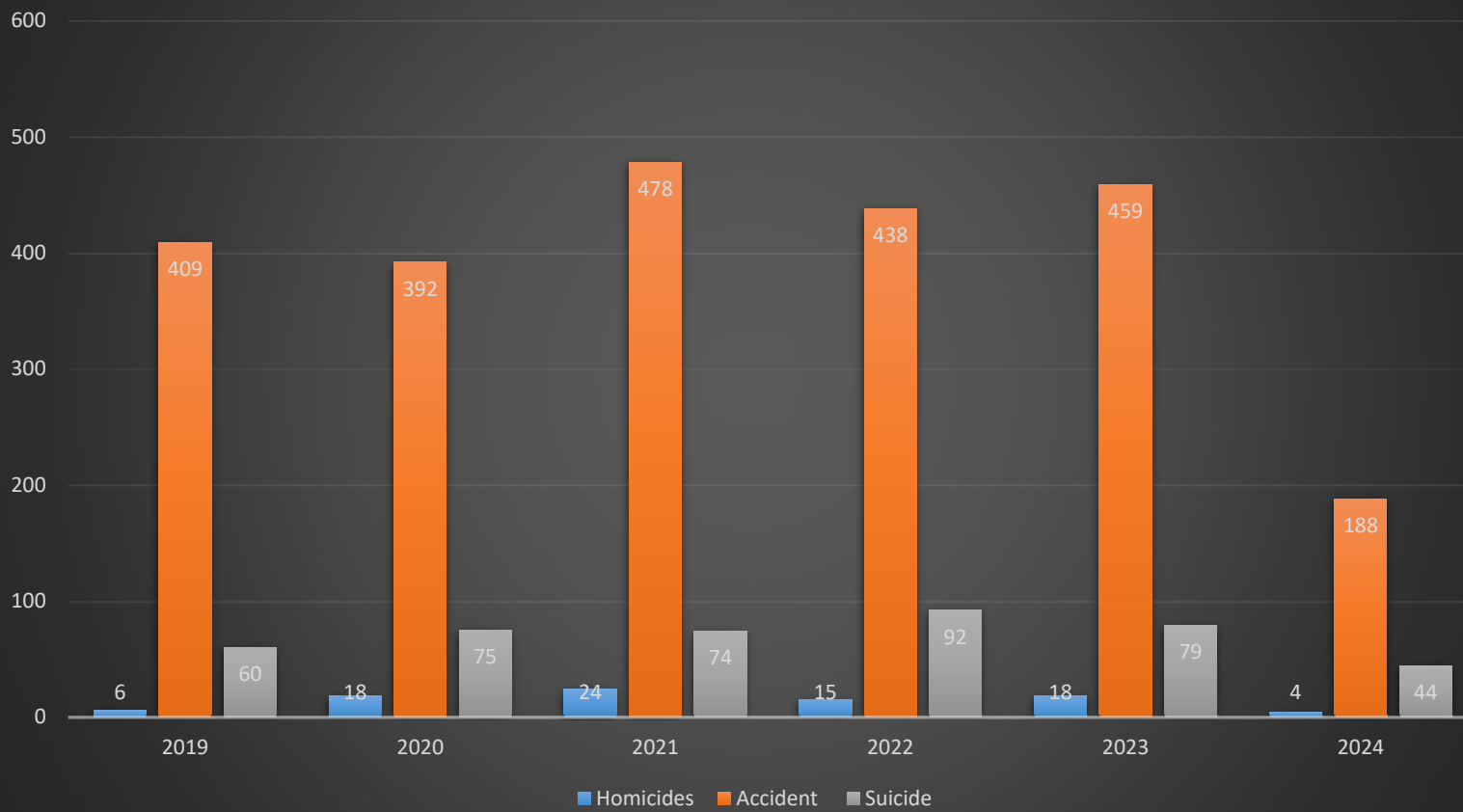
- ◎ Ashland County
- ◎ Richland County
  
- ◎ Rare...
  - Michigan
  - Federal Bureau of Investigation (Tribal)
  - Federal Bureau of Investigation (Consultation)
  
- ◎ By Statute
  - out of state cases transported to local hospitals
  - Inmate/patient of state institution



# Case Type



### Chart Title

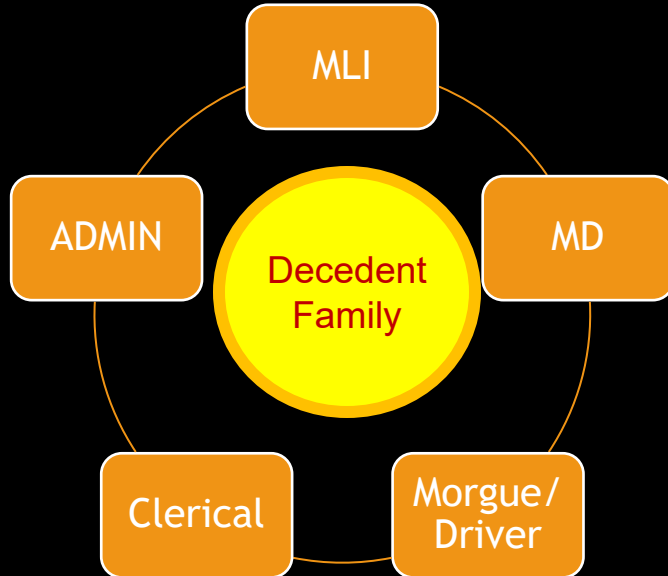


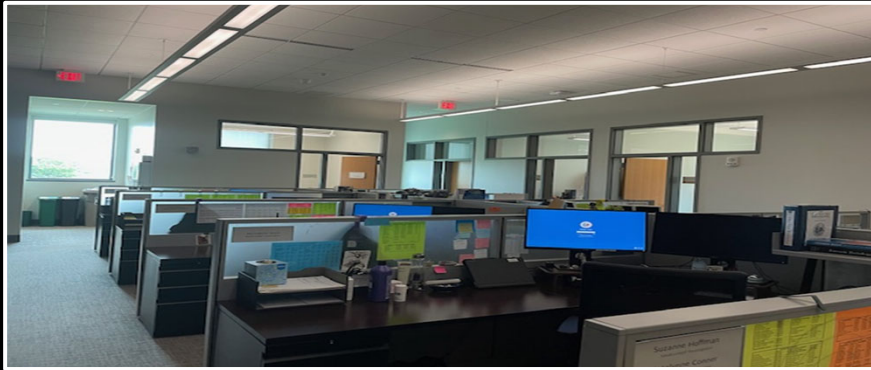
# Organization

- Chief M.E.
- 2 Deputy M.E.
- 3 FTE Morgue techs
- 2 LTE Morgue techs
- 8 FTE MLI
- 8 LTE MLI
- 1 Lead MLI
- Director of Operations
- Deputy Director of Operations
- Chief Investigator
- 2 Clerks
- 7 LTE Drivers

# Multidirectional flow

- ◎ 24/7/365 service
- ◎ On-call administration
- ◎ On-call physicians

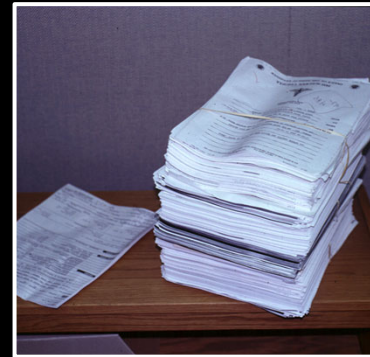




“Dane County  
Medical Examiner’s  
Office, this



Scene  
Response



Record  
Review



Examination



Release

*Autopsy – Enrique Simonet*



# Examination



*The Autopsy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*  
-Rembrandt 1632

- External Examination
- Autopsy
  
- Ancillary Testing
  - COVID/ Virology/ Microbiology swabs
  - Toxicology
  - Radiographic imaging
  - Histology
  - Anthropology

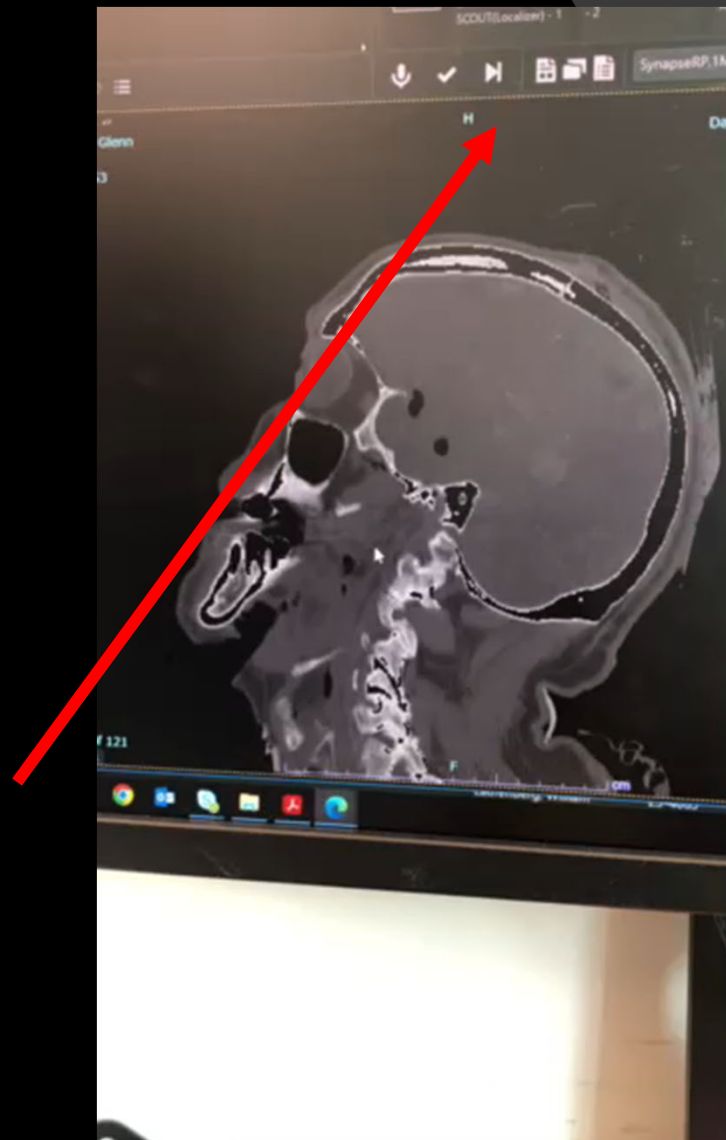




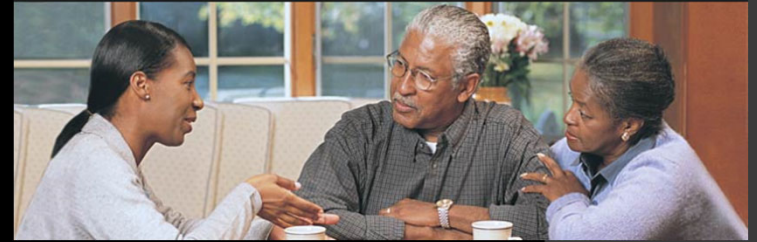
# CT



Radiology Expansion Project



# Assisting the family



- ◎ Discuss the autopsy procedure
  - Understanding need and extent
  - Understanding respect towards the decedent
  - Objections/requests
- ◎ Social services/support groups
- ◎ Timeline of procedures, “next steps”
- ◎ Media release

# Future Goals

## ◎ Internal

- SOPs
- Full MD staff (5)
- NAME accreditation
- Fellowship program
- Internal MLI training program
- In-house on-demand virtual training for MLI
- Expansion of office space
- Full Body CT scanner

## ◎ External

- Annual Report
- Promote education and certification of MLI/C/ME in Wisconsin
- Provide virtual on-demand training
- Develop current resources

Just one more thing....



# Re-Unification

- ◎ 10 unclaimed decedents
- ◎ 2 of the 10 are Unidentified

## *35 Years Later, the Remains Known as 'Chimney Doe' Have a Name and a Face*

A skeleton found in the chimney of a Wisconsin music store in 1989 has been identified, relaunching a police investigation that had been dormant for decades.

▶ Listen to this article · 5:02 min [Learn more](#)

📄 Share full article



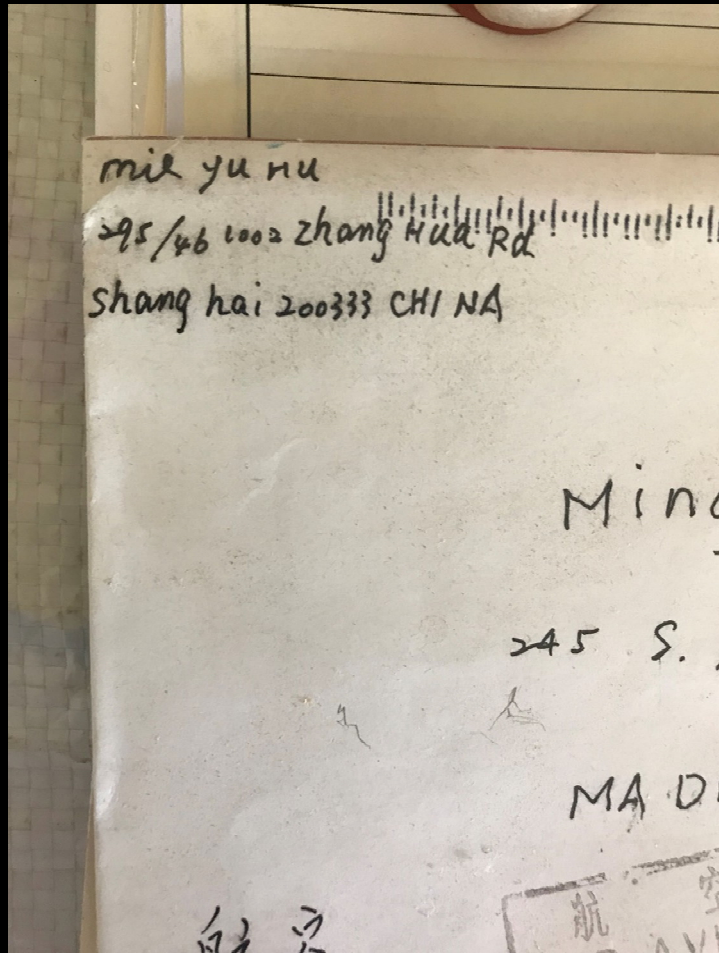
Decades after a skeleton was found in a chimney, police officials in Wisconsin identified who the person was. [John Hart/Wisconsin State Journal, via Associated Press](#)

Car  
The identity of a de  
Junior Isaacs Jr., a :

7911

Buy Now

August 2, 2021



*“Just wanted to share with you all, since we don’t get to see this side of our cases very often. This is a gentleman who was [in our care] for almost two years and it was very challenging to get in touch with his family in China. A local Chinese organization was instrumental in helping get in touch with and communicating with his family; they honored Mr. Lee by keeping his ashes here, at the request of Lee’s family, in the city he loved so much. Mr. Tao shared these with me after he was able to sprinkle Mr. Lee’s ashes into Lake Mendota yesterday.*

*Kari”      May 28, 2023*





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# Thank You

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| YEAR | Overdoses ALL | Total Opioid Related Deaths | % of overall OD that are opioid related | Fentanyl listed on DC | % of overall OD that include Fentanyl |
|------|---------------|-----------------------------|---|-----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2023 | 126           | 95                          | 75.40                                   | 80                    | 63.49                                 |
| 2022 | 160           | 139                         | 86.88                                   | 126                   | 78.75                                 |
| 2021 | 172           | 149                         | 86.63                                   | 131                   | 76.16                                 |
| 2020 | 150           | 131                         | 87.33                                   | 108                   | 72.00                                 |
| 2019 | 135           | 113                         | 83.70                                   | 96                    | 71.11                                 |
| 2018 | 116           | 98                          | 84.48                                   | 67                    | 57.76                                 |
| 2017 | 122           | 103                         | 84.43                                   | 53                    | 43.44                                 |
| 2016 | 117           | 97                          | 82.91                                   | 38                    | 32.48                                 |