



Office of the  
**Dane County Medical Examiner**

Dr. Vincent Tranchida  
Chief Medical Examiner



TO: Supervisor Rusk, Chair of Public Protection and Judiciary  
FROM: Barry Irmen,  
DATE: 05-16-15  
RE: Resolution regarding Fees

Recently the Joint Committee on Finance made a substantial change in the law impacting the Medical Examiner's Office ability to generate fee income to support services in Dane County. We are requesting that Dane County make some important changes prior to the adoption of the state budget. Other counties in Wisconsin are proceeding in a similar manner.

Currently Dane County only charges a cremation fee generating \$640,000.00 in 2015. Indigent families can have their funeral expenses covered by the state Funeral Assistance Fund now administered by the State of Wisconsin. Currently the funeral homes reimburse Dane County for cremation fees for indigent families as an allowable expense. The change in the law, spearheaded by funeral home lobbyists, buried in the budget, prohibits this reimbursement to the counties and requires the ME's Office to waive the cremation fee, and any other fees, when a decedent qualifies for the Funeral Assistance Program. Although it is difficult to estimate what the exact impact will be, it is safe to assume that roughly 10%-15% of cremation fees will be waived thereby leaving a budget hole of roughly \$70,000.00.

The subsequent amendment to this budget item will also freeze all fees for 2 years, and then only allow the fee to be raised at the rate of increase in the CPI. This freeze will not allow the County to cover the costs associated with providing the statutorily prescribed duty of performing cremation examinations and inquiring into each of these deaths.

The Medical Examiner's Office has had a significant increase in case load and cremation duties in the last several years. Cremations have increased in popularity as a form of final disposition due in part to the reduced cost to survivors or estates. The table below outlines the 82% increase in cremations from 2010 to 2014.

Year	Total Cremation Investigations
2010	1329
2011	1966
2012	2117
2013	2302
2014	2419

In addition to an increase in Cremation investigations we have had a significant increase in caseload. The table below outlines the case count numbers for the last several years. The table demonstrates a ~~61%~~119% increase in caseload from 2010 to 2014.

Year	Case Count (Excluding Cremations)
2010	1101
2011	1201
2012	1270
2013	<del>2302</del> 1686
2014	<del>2419</del> 1774

In the 2016 budget process the Medical Examiner's Office will be asking for additional staff to manage the increasing Dane County death investigation workload. We plan to ask for at least one additional FTE Chief of investigations; to increase our .5 Clerk Typist to a 1.0 FTE position; and, to add a .5 morgue technician for 6 months of the year and in July 2016 to change that position to a 1.0 FTE. The Medical Examiner caseload has increased tremendously in the last 5 years. As we have discussed many times the case investigations are becoming more complicated and require more resources. Our investigators are committed to the mission but we are really asking too much of them too often. We are concerned about turnover of FTE staff based on the ever increasing workload.

Although we are disappointed by the JFC and the State in general for their short sightedness in this recent decision, we feel we have no choice but to recommend an increase to the cremation fee and to institute a Death Certificate signing fee. Our staff, doctors included, spend a large amount of time and resources providing these services. We would have made some level of similar fee request in the 2016 budget process but by the time that process starts we will be prohibited from making the necessary increases to cover the costs of providing the services.

Without the increased fees to offset GPR, and if we are denied positions, we will be forced to reduce services. These reductions will be a burden to Dane County families and our funeral home partners.

I appreciate the careful consideration of the Public Safety and Justice Committee in this matter.