



# DANE COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

Public Protection and Judiciary Committee Meeting  
May 26, 2026

Agnieszka Rogalska, MD

Chief Medical Examiner

Dane County Medical Examiner's Office

[rogalska.agnieszka@danecounty.gov](mailto:rogalska.agnieszka@danecounty.gov)



# 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.



# WISCONSIN STATE LEGISLATURE

HOME SENATE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEES SERVICE AGENCIES



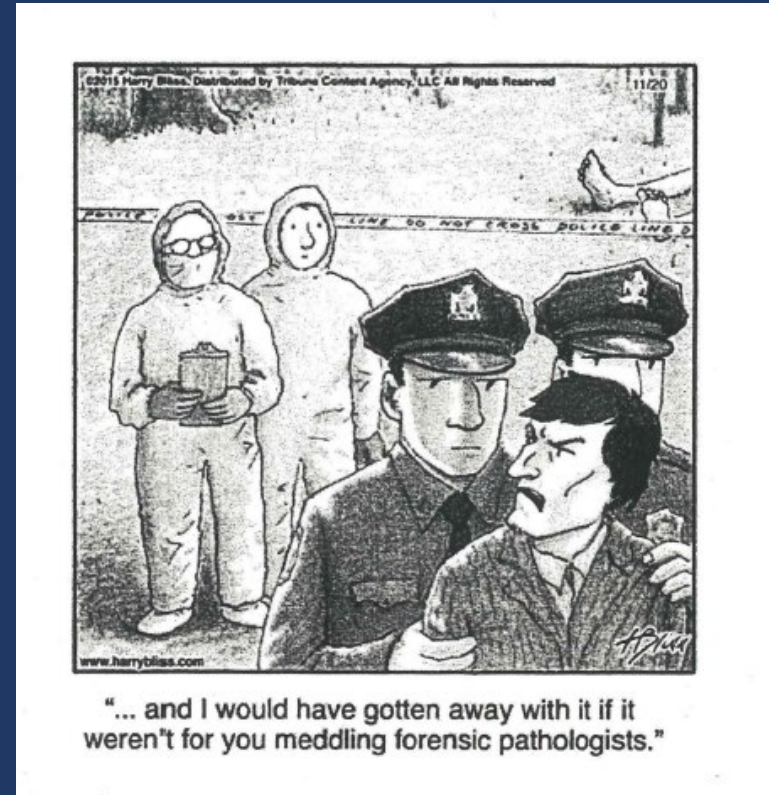
## Jurisdiction

- 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





# Role of the Coroner/Medical Examiner

- Gather vital record statistics
  - Violent death reporting
  - Death statistic
- Public health surveillance and statistics
  - Initial HIV/AIDS surveillance
  - Legionnaire's disease outbreak in NY
  - Influenza surveillance
- Consumer product safety
  - Child death reviews
  - Nike shoes with lead
  - Collapsible cribs
- Mass disaster preparedness and response
- Tissue Donation

**CDC** National Center for Health Statistics

## NVSS Vital Statistics Rapid Release

Quarterly Provisional Estimates

[Print](#)

**Related Pages**

- [Mortality Dashboard](#)
- [Technical Notes](#)



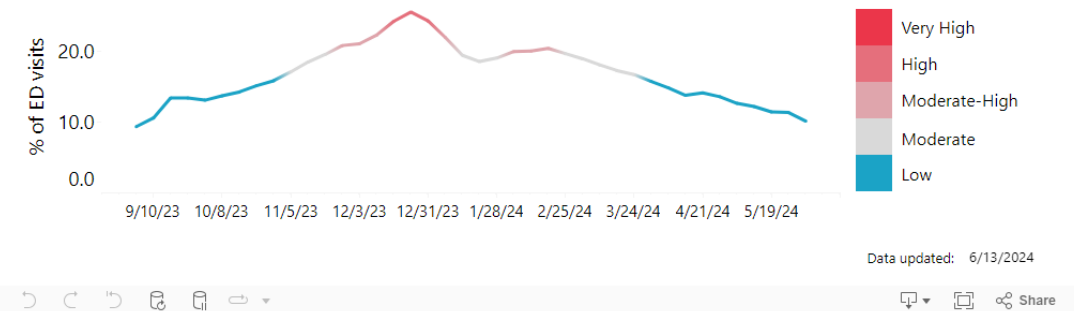
# Role of the Coroner/

- Gather vital record statistics
  - Violent death reporting
  - Death statistic
- Public health surveillance and statistics
  - Initial HIV/AIDS surveillance
  - Legionnaire's disease outbreak in NY
  - Influenza surveillance



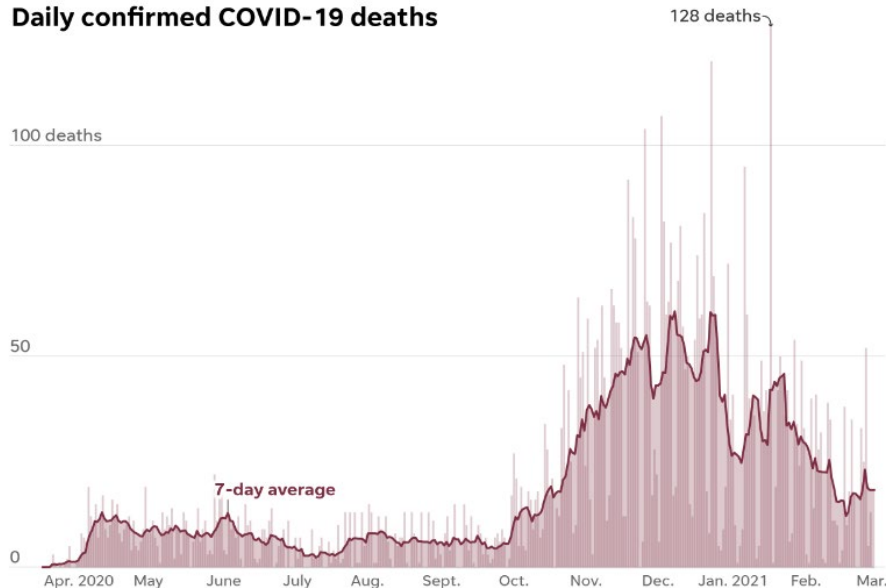
## Respiratory illness trends

Data are interactive. **Hover over lines** to see more information.



Understanding our data

## Daily confirmed COVID-19 deaths



N.Y. / REGION

## Hospital Alters Conclusions in Patient Death

By THOMAS J. LUECK and ANAHAD O'CONNOR APRIL 27, 2005

### Correction Appended

Days after NewYork-Presbyterian/Columbia Hospital said that a patient's death last month had not been caused by Legionnaires' disease, it reversed itself yesterday, saying that an autopsy showed that the disease had indeed led to the death. The hospital also said that the bacteria associated with the disease were found yesterday at a large inpatient center that it operates more than 100 blocks from the building where the case occurred.

In a formal statement yesterday, the hospital said that the disease was the "primary factor" in the death of the patient, whose identity it would not disclose, at its Milstein Hospital building in Washington Heights. It also said that the bacteria had been detected in the water supply of its Greenberg Pavilion at the NewYork-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell hospital, on the Upper East Side.

The hospital said it had no idea why the two buildings' water supplies, both provided by the city's water system and routinely treated to kill the bacteria,



# Role of the Coroner/Medical Examiner

CDC Home Search Health Topics A-Z

**MMWR**

Dispatch

March 23, 2006 / 55(Dispatch);1-2

Persons using assistive technology might not be able to fully access information in this file. For assistance, please send e-mail to: [mmwrq@cdc.gov](mailto:mmwrq@cdc.gov). Type 508 Accommodation and the title of the report in the subject line of e-mail.

**Death of a Child After Ingestion of a Metallic Charm --- Minnesota, 2006**

- Influenza surveillance
- Consumer product safety
  - Child death reviews
  - Nike shoes with lead
  - Collapsible cribs
- Mass disaster preparedness and response
- Tissue Donation

**FIGURE.** Heart-shaped charm bracelet that is the subject of the voluntary recall announced March 23, 2006, by Reebok International Ltd. and the Consumer Product Safety Commission



Photo/Consumer Product Safety Commission



# Role of the Coroner/Medical Examiner

## Emergency Support Function #8 – Public Health and Medical Services Annex

- Agriculture safety and security
- All-hazard public health and medical consultation, technical assistance, and support
- Behavioral health care
- Public health and medical information
- Vector control
- Potable water/wastewater and solid waste disposal
- Mass fatality management, victim identification, and decontaminating remains
- Veterinary medical support

## Policies

- Consumer product safety
  - Child death reviews
  - Nike shoes with lead
  - Collapsible cribs
- Mass disaster preparedness and response
- Tissue Donation





# Role of the Coroner/Medical Examiner

- Gather vital record statistics
  - Violent death reporting
  - Death statistic
- Public health surveillance and statistics
  - Initial HIV/AIDS surveillance
  - Legionnaire's disease outbreak in NY
  - Influenza surveillance
- Consumer product safety
  - Child death reviews
  - Nike shoes with lead
  - Collapsible cribs
- Mass disaster preparedness and response
- **Tissue Donation**

## 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





# 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



# Medical Examiner in Wisconsin

- Appointed position
- Mandatory when population reached 700,000\*
  - \* Mandatory at 500,000 at time of Dane County's implementation
- There are no training requirements for Coroners or (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.



**John Stanley**  
Dane County Coroner (2000-2009)

### **Coroner, ME compare their positions**

By Jessie Waldheim  
Daily News staff writer  
Jun 22, 2005



JANESVILLE - The difference between a medical examiner and elected coroner system is how the office is filled - day-to-day operations are the same - the Rock County Public Safety and Justice Committee heard Monday.

Dane County Coroner John Stanley and Washington County Medical Examiner Pam Monroe stopped by the committee's regular meeting to discuss their positions.

Monroe explained she is not a forensic pathologist capable of performing autopsies. Instead she thinks of herself as a coroner who was hired by her county's safety committee. The duties of the medical examiner office - death investigations, record keeping, administering the office - are essentially the same. The major difference is how they get into office.

Another difference between a coroner and a medical examiner is coroners are required to live in the county they serve in. But the job description for Washington County's medical examiner included a requirement to live in the county.

"The benefit that I see is that Washington County had an opportunity to put together a job description for what they wanted," Monroe said.

With an elected coroner position, getting the office is a popularity contest. ....



## Public Safety

# No more outsourcing autopsies?

*Dane County wants a pathologist as coroner, but some say the cost will be steep*

By STEVEN ELBOW  
The Capital Times  
selbow@madison.com

For decades, when Dane County coroners have needed an autopsy performed, they have turned to experts at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Despite the perception among many that coroners perform autopsies, they typically are not qualified to do so.

Often coming from law enforcement backgrounds, coroners are typically the liaison between authorities, the public and families when someone dies unexpectedly. The wrenching task of informing next-of-kin about the deaths of loved ones is one of their chief duties. Under state law, coroners are also elected, just like county clerks and sheriffs.

But that is starting to change. Twenty-seven of Wisconsin's 72 counties have abandoned coroners in favor of hired medical examiners, and a state law will force Dane County to be one of them soon.

The trend is partly about giving greater oversight of the office to county executives and containing costs. But it is also about increasing the level of professionalism associated with the work of coroners. To that end, Dane County is considering severing its relationship with the UW medical school and hiring its own forensic pathologists even though UW officials are skeptical that the county would save money.

"We believe if we were able to secure the service of one or two pathologists it would be a cost-effective way to deliver that necessary service," says Topf Wells, chief of staff to County Executive Kathleen Falk. "And it would make very good use of some physical facilities that the county has," referring to the autopsy facility in the coroner's office in the City-County Building.

Wells says the idea has support on the County Board, but given the cost and a



**Dane County Coroner Ray Wosepka says he's putting together a plan with an eye toward showing that the county can break even by hiring its own pathologists.**

nationwide shortage of forensic pathologists, a UW official questions whether the county can pull it off.

"We've been doing (autopsies) for 50 years and we hope to continue doing them," says Gordon Ridley, senior associate dean for the UW School of Medicine and Public Health, which oversees the UW's two forensic pathologists. "I'd be surprised if they went in that direction."

The county pays the UW about \$1,050 for each autopsy the medical school performs. The university's pathologists performed 207 autopsies for the county in 2007 and 153 in 2008, totaling \$216,778 and \$162,766, respectively. The average of those two years, \$189,772, is likely in the neighborhood of what the county would have to pay for one pathologist of its own.

County Coroner Ray Wosepka says he's putting together a plan for county officials with an eye toward showing that they can break even by hiring their own pathologists.

But Ridley doesn't think it will pay off for the county. For one thing, he says, the county will need at least two and maybe three pathologists to cover all shifts. And

at about \$200,000 apiece, the expense adds up to a tidy sum.

Underlying the issue is a state law forcing counties to change from a coroner to a medical examiner system upon reaching the 500,000 population mark, which will likely happen soon in Dane County. The county plans to make the change by Jan. 2, 2011, when the coroner who will be elected in 2010 would take office.

State Sen. Fred Risser, D-Madison, who has been in the Legislature for more than a half-century, says the population benchmark was commonly used when lawmakers wanted to target legislation for Milwaukee County alone since, for decades, no other county was even close to reaching a population of 500,000.

But because Dane County is fast approaching the benchmark, "they're going to have to re-examine that figure in the statutes," he says.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the county had 482,705 people last year. That's an 18 percent increase since 2000, and a mere 3.6 percent away from a half-million.

Aside from Milwaukee, other counties are under no statutory obligation. Yet more than a third of the state's counties have dispensed with their coroners and moved to medical examiners.

There are other signs that the coroner's office could be an endangered species. In 2005, a Legislative Council committee offered up a constitutional amendment to eliminate coroners' offices altogether, though the effort never got off the ground.

There may also be a national movement afoot to eliminate the coroner system, replacing it with a system of medical examiners.

The National Academy of Sciences is urging Congress to authorize funds for states and local jurisdictions to establish regional medical examiner offices, to provide incentives to get more students interested in forensic pathology, to establish national standards for the field and other reforms.

But the vast majority of medical examiner offices in Wisconsin are not run by forensic pathologists. They are administered by people with diverse qualifications, just like coroners, who are not required to hold medical degrees.

"The only difference is they are appointed, not elected," says Wosepka.

It's an important distinction. It means a medical examiner can be fired by county officials, while coroners, because they are elected to a constitutional office, can only be removed by the governor with cause.

Dodge County moved to a medical examiner system in 2002 after a new coroner overran his budget as he tried to modernize the office, which previously had been held by the same coroner for 26 years.

Rock County considered the change in 2005. That year, Coroner Karen Gilbertson resigned and pleaded no-contest to misconduct in office after being accused of stealing prescription drugs from death scenes. But after several citizens and some



## Medical examiner takes office

by Sylvia Krohn  
February 2, 2011



Paul Rusk

Dane County Board Supervisor District 12

Following Dane County's decision to switch from having a county coroner to a county medical examiner, the new position was put into action Tuesday as a prominent specialist from New York transitioned into office.

Dr. Vincent Trachida was appointed to the position after an extended search for qualified candidates.

"It was a nationwide search, and there aren't that many people qualified to do that work," Paul Rusk, Dist. 12 supervisor, said.

Trachida will replace acting Dane County medical examiner Barry Irmen, who was appointed to the position after previous county coroner, Ray Wosepka, passed away last March.

Before Irmen took office, Dane County had to rely on the University of Wisconsin hospital to administer autopsies.

Trachida joins a staff of 11 coroners who assist at the scene of accidents and work with family members to get bodies to the correct facilities.

"Now we can have someone that not only consoles families, but someone that can also do autopsies," said Josh Wescott, spokesperson for the county executive.

Rusk said he expects Trachida's office to be incredibly busy and perform several hundred autopsies each year. Rusk said Trachida will also be responsible for working with the University of Wisconsin Hospital to back up their doctors in an effort to keep strong relationships with the hospital's staff.

Irmen said the county has received excellent service from the hospital's forensic pathologist in the past, but the switch will save money and provide Dane County citizens with better service from the medical examiner's office.

Trachida said he will use his position to work with the surrounding community and with UW.

"My goal is to make our office very available to the university and be a very good reference to students," Trachida said.

According to Wisconsin state law, when a population reaches 500,000, a county is required to put a medical examiner into office instead of a county coroner. Following population data obtained last year, it was determined that Dane County needed to make the transition by Jan. 1, 2011.

A medical examiner can perform autopsies whereas a coroner is not qualified to administer the procedure.

Irmen said Dane County's numbers from the previous census were very close to reaching 500,000, and the change in position would have undoubtedly been necessary in the next term.



## New Dane County medical examiner ready for job

GEORGE HESSELBERG |  
Jan 31, 2011 Updated Jan 31, 2011

WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL



Dr. Vincent Tranchida, 39, has been in and out of Madison over the past three weeks, but begins officially Tuesday as Dane County's first medical examiner. The elected coroner position ended Jan. 1. M.P. KING — State Journal

Dr. Vincent Tranchida expects some changes in his death investigation assignments.

In New York City, where he worked for the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, “you never know what would be coming through the door.”

In Dane County, where he starts work Tuesday, “I expect I will have a lot fewer subway deaths.”

Tranchida (pronounced tran-KEE-dah), 39, a forensic pathologist who will conduct autopsies and join a staff of 11, will be Dane County's first medical examiner. The position expands the responsibilities of the elected coroner's office, which officially closed Jan. 1. At a salary of \$190,000 annually, he will be Dane County's highest-paid employee, and indications are he will be working long hours to earn it. There are predictions for the need of as many as 300 autopsies this year or in 2012.

In interviews last week, Tranchida was amiable, open and self-deprecating, chatting about his years in New York City and professional expectations in Dane County as he prepared for the move to Madison. Meanwhile, this week at the Dane County Public Safety Building, a corner office on the second floor down the hallway from the Sheriff's Office still carried the smell of fresh drywall.

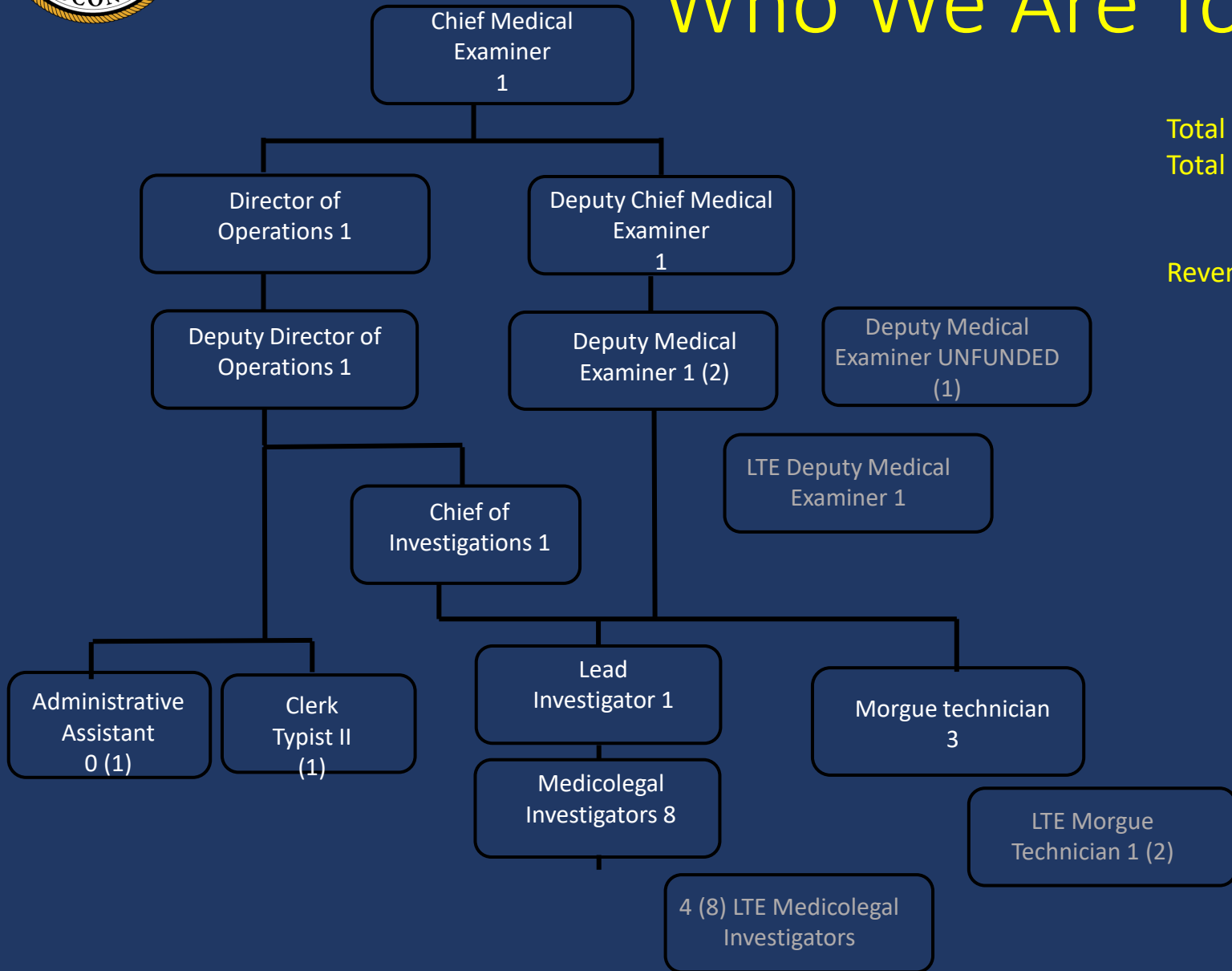






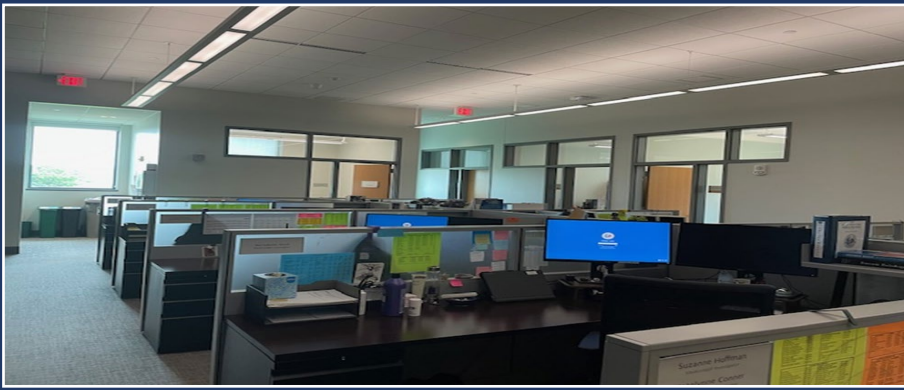


# Who We Are Today



Total 2026 Department Spending: \$5,200,463  
 Total 2026 GPR Spending: \$3,330,261

Revenue sources funding department programming:  
 IGA with Rock Count  
 Autopsy services to outside counties  
 Permit (Cremation) Fees  
 Pathology Consultations  
 Morgue use fee



“Dane County Medical Examiner’s Office, this is...”



Scene Response



Record Review



Autopsy – Enrique Simonet

Examination



Release



# Examination



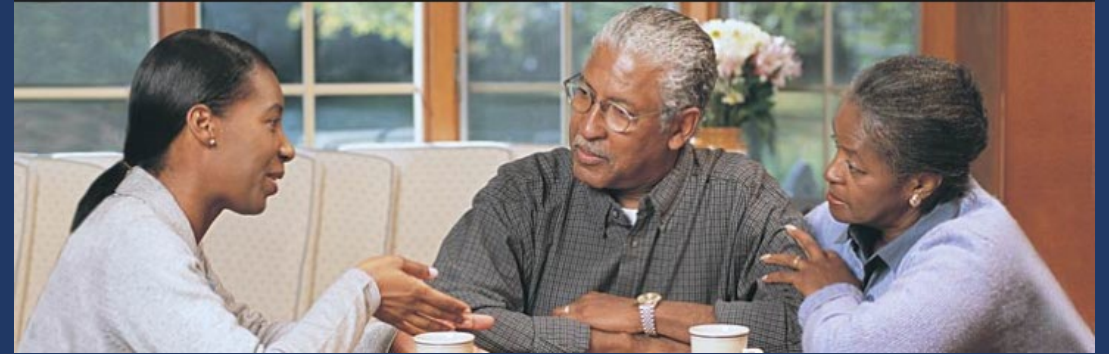
*The Autopsy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp*  
-Rembrandt 1632

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



# 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





# Re-Unification

- 2024 – 2 of 10 Unidentified
- 2026 – 0 Dane 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](#)

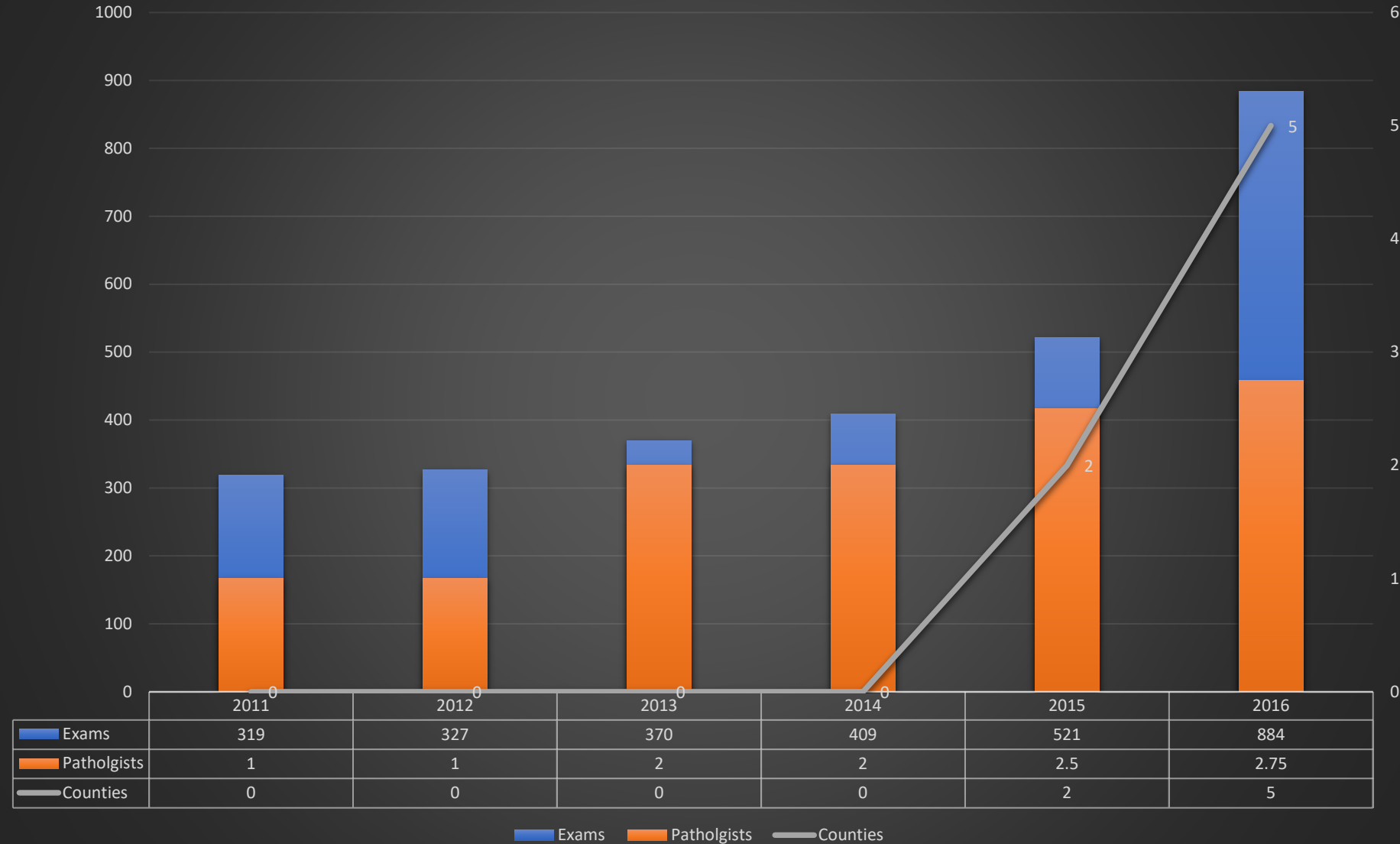
🎁 Share full article



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](#)



## Autopsy Service





## Rock County looks to Dane County for medical examiner

Officer has been without full-time coroner since November

- By Velena Jones
- Aug 20, 2014



Rock County may soon be looking to Dane County for medical examiner services, after the current county coroner's elected term is finished the first of next year.

Assistant to the Rock County Administrator Randy Terronez said after years of concerns with how the Coroner's Office operates, this year county board officials decided to eliminate the Rock County coroner position and transition to a medical examiner.

"There has been a certain amount of controversy in the last 10 years or so. There's been concern about how the office was operated. Having it appointed instead of elected where the voters end up deciding who that person is, and through the authority of the county administrator office who would do the hiring, appointment and supervision, that sets up a better of accountability," Terronez said.

On Monday, the Rock County Public Safety and Justice Committee board supervisors were presented with two proposals to consider:

The stand alone option would keep operations in Rock County and include a medical examiner department headed by a non-physician. The county would hire a full-time chief medical examiner, a deputy chief medical examiner and a deputy medical examiner. The proposal would also allow for seven part time deputy medical examiners. Start-up cost for the office would be \$18,100 with an annual cost of \$573,676.

The second option would involve contracting with the Dane County Medical Examiner's office. Dane County would supply a county medical examiner, deputy medical examiner and a forensic pathologist/physician who would provide management and services for Rock County.

Positions would be contracted with Dane County through an intergovernmental agreement. Rock County would hire three medicolegal investigators, two part-time medicolegal investigators and a part time clerical worker.

The cost to contract through Dane County would involve a start-up cost of \$30,164 and an annual cost of \$597,789.

Either choice would cost more than the current office. The Rock County Coroner's Office 2014 budget is \$458,061. Terronez attributes the increased cost to staffing model changes from per diem deputies to established full-time and part-time staff, as well as an increased number of autopsies.



## Dane County Executive Parisi Announces Proposed Regional Medical Examiner's Partnership for Dane and Brown County

October 16, 2015

Stephanie Miller, 608-267-8823

County Executive

Dane County Executive Parisi announced today that Dane County will provide medical examiner services to Brown County if a new intergovernmental agreement is approved. The agreement will increase Dane County's development of regional service and help save taxpayer money. The resolution to approve the intergovernmental agreement will be introduced to the Dane County Board tonight and is currently in front of the Brown County board.

"The Dane County Medical Examiner's Office continues to innovate to provide quality, professional work that benefits families and law enforcement in Dane County and in many counties throughout Wisconsin," said Parisi. "This new agreement will allow our office to maintain that service in the face of rising caseloads and save taxpayer money."

Dane County converted to a professional Medical Examiner's Office in 2011 and since then has performed death investigation and autopsy work for a number of Wisconsin counties, providing a regional network for the specialty work of forensic pathology.

The office, led by Dr. Vincent Tranchida, will continue that work in the brand new state-of-the-art Dane County East District Campus currently under construction. The new facility will greatly expand the ability of the Office to coordinate even the most complicated death investigations and include the most state-of-the-art forensic technology to ensure work is both thorough and conducted in a timely fashion. This will greatly aid local law enforcement and prosecutors in resolving the most complex cases.

"Dane County is known as the gold standard in medical death investigations," said Brown County Executive Streckenbach. "Regionalizing their expertise will provide greater level of services for our area and long term taxpayer savings by cost sharing resources."

Revenue from the proposed intergovernmental agreement will help pay for the cost of 4.5 new positions for the Dane County Medical Examiner's office. Currently, Dane County is contracted to do all of the death investigations for Rock County. In addition, Dane County also provides autopsy medicine and forensic investigative services to 12 other Wisconsin counties and one county in Illinois.



## New Dane County Medical Examiner Facility will help keep up autopsy demands

By Jennifer Fetterly | [jfetterly@hngnews.com](mailto:jfetterly@hngnews.com) Aug 17, 2016 Updated Feb 10, 2025



Dane County Executive Joe Parisi recently showed off the new East District Campus Project, which includes the new Medical Examiner's complex off Hwy. 12-18 [Buy Now](#)  
Jennifer Fetterly photo

A \$10 million state-of-the-art Dane County Medical Examiner's Office set to open mid-October in Madison will help staff keep up with a 45 percent increase in autopsies.

With Dane County providing services to 12 other Wisconsin counties and one Illinois county, Dane County Executive Joe Parisi said the new facility opening is highly anticipated.

"This is the best of both worlds, providing better service to Dane County residents, and working with other counties to save them money and help them out, and doing it in a way that is fiscally responsible," Parisi said.



Monday August 28, 2017













## Autopsies swamp Dane County's shorthanded Medical Examiner's Office

Rob Schultz | Wisconsin State Journal  
Jan 28, 2018

Since it began taking cases from other counties two years ago, the Dane County Medical Examiner's Office has conducted 70 percent more autopsies a year than in 2015.

Most of the 827 autopsies completed last year were done by just two forensic pathologists, a crushing workload that far exceeded the recommended 250 autopsies a year by the National Association of Medical Examiners.

At the same time, a national shortage of qualified pathologists has made it all but impossible to fill two open positions, a spokesman for the office said.

Dr. Vincent Tranchida, the county's chief medical examiner, and Dr. Agnieszka Rogalska, the deputy chief, didn't take a single vacation day last year, often working 10 to 12 hours a day for six days a week to keep up with the flood of cases, spokesman Barry Irmen said.



Although authorized to have four pathologists, the Dane County Medical Examiner's Office currently has just two despite taking on cases from several other counties in recent years. Director of Operations Barry Irmen, above, said it helps that the office has expanded to a new site on the Southeast Side with three autopsy suites, triple the number it had before.

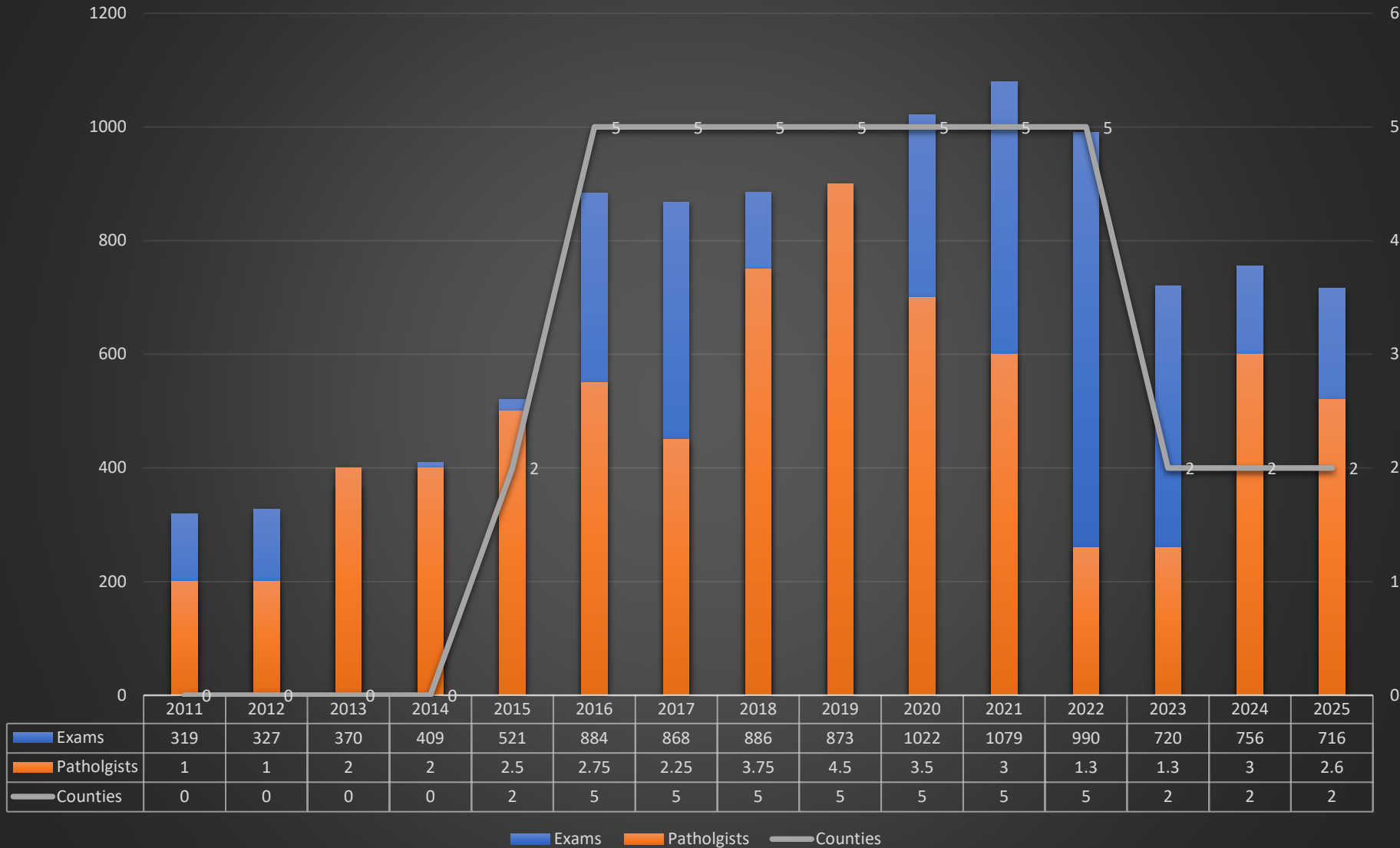
AMBER ARNOLD, STATE JOURNAL







## Autopsy Service



Exams Pathologists Counties



# What We Do

Call review  
Scene response  
Investigation  
Notification

Cremation views

History/Follow up  
Record Review  
Family contact  
Disposition  
Permits  
Releases

Medicolegal  
Investigators

Filing  
Requisitions  
Inventory

Exam assistance  
Cleaning  
Releases/photos  
Medications  
Stocking  
Equipment  
Sample prep  
Deliveries

Morgue  
Technicians

On-call duties  
Case disposition  
Training questions

Consultations  
Ancillary testing  
Reports  
Death certificates  
Testimony  
MLI Oversight

Examinations  
Scene Responses

Pathologists

Budget  
Invoices  
Press releases  
Records releases  
Schedule/staffing  
Maintenance  
Partnerships  
Public response

Scene response  
Training  
IGA commitments

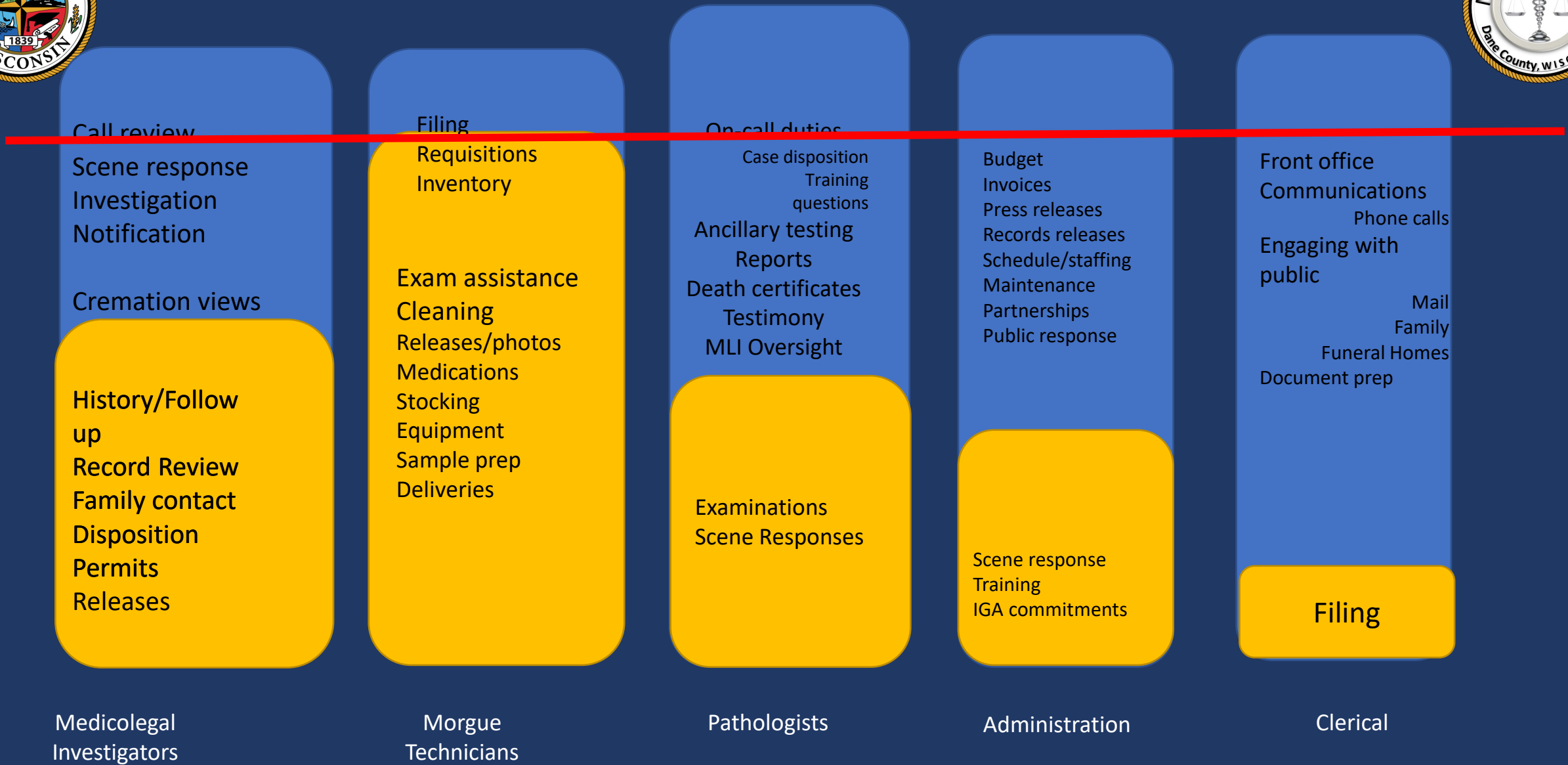
Administration

Front office  
Communications  
Phone calls

Engaging with public  
Mail  
Family  
Funeral Homes  
Document prep

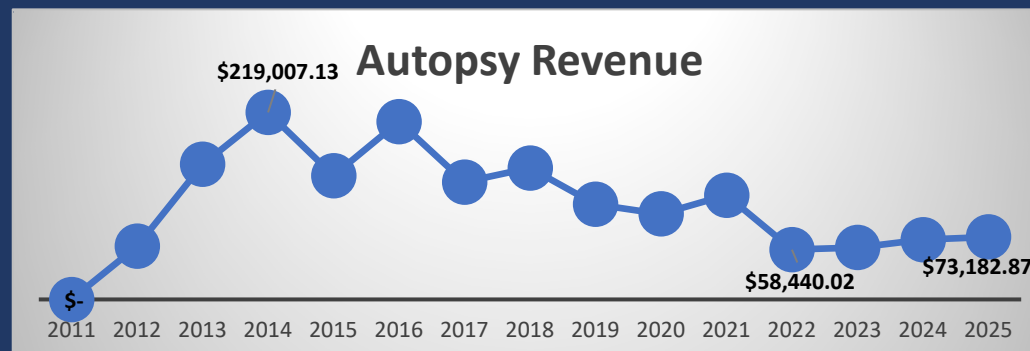
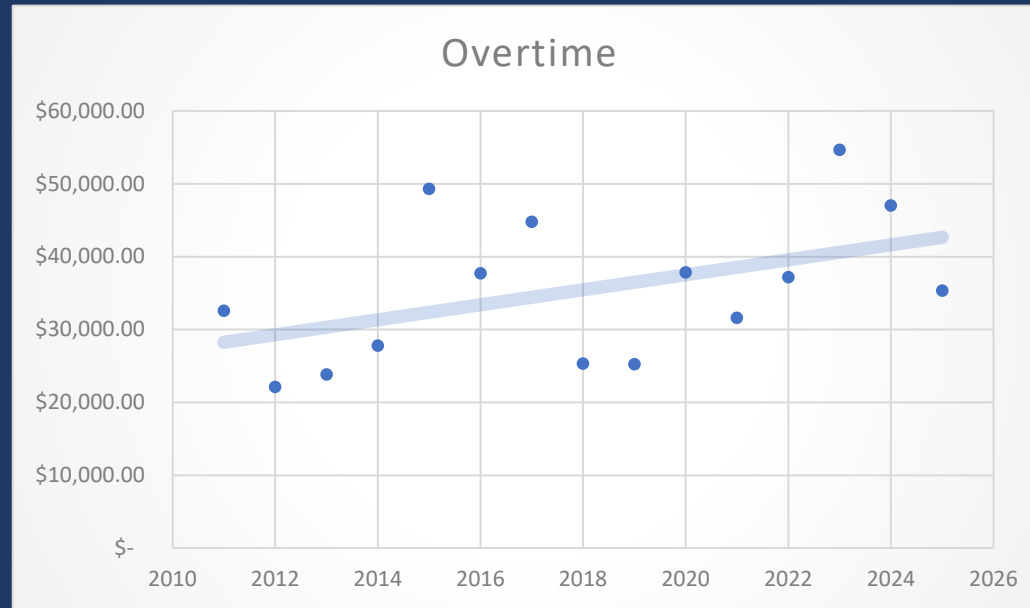
Filing

Clerical





# Consequences



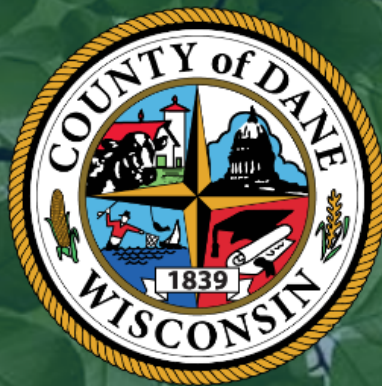


# Consequences

- Employee “burnout”
- Limited growth and development
- Partner Impact



# Moving Forward



## 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.



# Thank You

[rogalska.agnieszka@countyofdane.com](mailto:rogalska.agnieszka@countyofdane.com)