Medical Examiner Department
Business Plan

Fiscal Years: 2016 and 2017
(10/1/2015 through 9/30/2017)

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Delivering Excellence Every Day

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW Page 2
- Departmental Mission
- Table of Organization
- Strategic Alignment Summary
- Our Customer

KEY ISSUES Page 6

PRIORITY INITIATIVES Page 6

FUTURE OUTLOOK Page 7

ATTACHMENT 1 Page 8
BUSINESS PLAN REPORT

DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

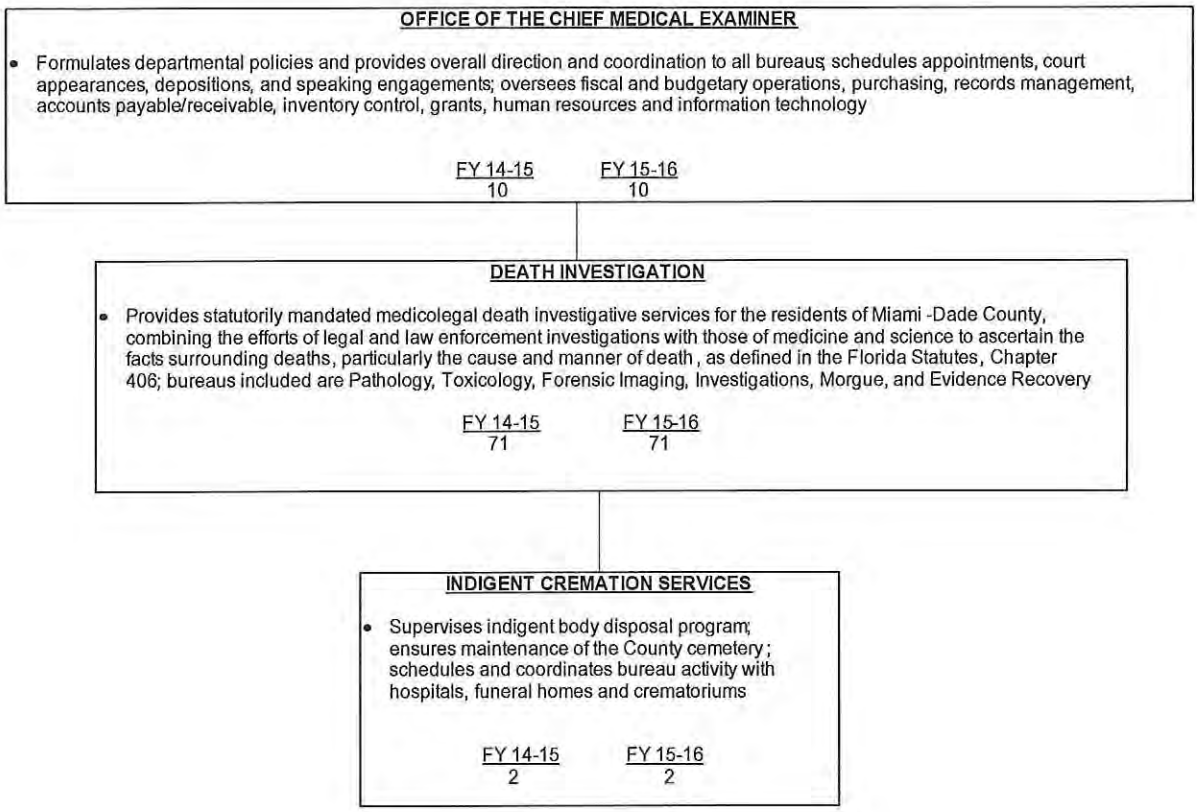
Department Mission

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

The Medical Examiner Department exists to provide statutorily mandated medicolegal death investigative services for the residents of Miami-Dade 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 approximately 13,000 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 Indigent Cremation Services provides low-cost disposition for abandoned, unclaimed human remains and for deceased members of indigent Miami-Dade 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, UMTB Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, law enforcement agencies, medical offices and hospitals, funeral homes, and the media. The Medical Examiner Department currently has eighty-three (83) full-time employees in its various bureaus, which include: the Director's Office, Pathology, Toxicology, and Operations. Within Operations are: the business office, information technology, records, morgue, photography, investigations, training, and indigent cremation services.

Table of Organization



Strategic Alignment Summary

I. The Department's mission aligns with the following Miami-Dade County Strategic Plan Goals:

1. Reduced Crime (PS1)
2. Reductions in Preventable Death, Injury and Property Loss (PS2)
3. Effective Emergency and Disaster Management (PS3)
4. Safe and customer-friendly transportation system (TP2)
5. A stable and diversified economic base that maximizes inclusion of higher paying jobs in sustainable growth (ED1)
6. Friendly Government (GG1)
7. Excellent, Engaged Workforce (GG2)
8. Efficient and Effective Service Delivery Through Technology (GG3)
9. Effective Management Practices (GG4)
10. Goods, services and assets that support County operations (GG5)

Strategic Alignment Summary

Select Department-related Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives with related departmental Programs & Initiatives:

CODE	STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES
PS1	**Reduced crime**	
PS1-2	Solve crimes quickly and accurately	Maintain timely evidence collection and investigative services, completion of autopsy protocols and pending cases, toxicological analysis and 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 System (NamUs.org).
		Provide quality, relevant and professional training programs.
		Maintain death scene investigative services by certified medicolegal death investigators and medical examiners.
PS2	**Reductions in Preventable Death, Injury and Property Loss**	
PS2-1	Reduce response time	Improve Forensic Evidence Recovery Team (FERT) response time to under 60 minutes.
		Identify new abused drugs and chemicals in the community that present potential public health problems that may result in death.
GG2	**Excellent, engaged workforce**	
GG2-1	Attract and hire new talent	Support and maintain competitive employee compensation and benefit packages.
		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 for quality medical examiners.
GG2-2	Develop and retain excellent employees and leaders	Support and maintain required professional certification for forensic photographers and medicolegal death investigators.
		Renew accreditation with Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME).
		Mentor young toxicologists through a tiered organizational structure within the department's toxicology laboratory to prepare for board certification.
		Train qualified dentists through the contractual services of the department's forensic odontologist.
GG3	**Efficient and Effective service delivery through technology**	
GG3-2	Effectively deploy technology solutions	Purchase specialized advanced analytical instrumentation to identify and measure newly emerging abused drugs 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).
		Continue development of Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS) to include complete data interface capability.
		Upgrade department's data management software (CME).
		Implement and develop software system for managing all aspects of a mass fatality incident.
		Provide web access to toxicology laboratory data for outside clients.
		Convert to paperless department.
		Improve internal chain of custody tracking systems.
		Upgrade fiber optic access to the County network.
		Upgrade fiber optic access between Administration and Morgue/Laboratory buildings.
GG4	**Effective management practice**	
GG4-2	Effectively allocate and utilize resources to meet current and future operating and capital needs	Amplify existing capacity for the department-wide network storage areas and backup strategies.
		Re-establish the departmental offsite data backup capabilities to MDPD Headquarters via a secured VLAN. Include backup of Forensic Imaging Bureau images via this link and encrypted backup.
GG5	**Goods, services and assets that support County operations**	
GG5-2	Provide well maintained, accessible facilities and assets	Remodel technician staff room.
		Replace emergency power generator (GSA).
		Install new fiber optic cabling to replace aging infrastructure.
		Replace aging air handling and purification systems in main morgue, Toxicology Laboratory, and sterile tissue recovery suite.

Our Customers

The Miami-Dade Medical Examiner 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 in order to determine the cause and manner of death as defined in Florida Statute, Chapter 406.

The specialized nature of the Medical Examiner 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 as a consequence of the jurisdiction in which the death occurs, and each decedent will be followed by family members. As a government agency established by state statute and funded by public dollars, we have a clearly defined customer base:

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 record 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 hosts forensic seminars, such as the Medicolegal Investigation of Death and the International Forensic Photography Workshop. These seminars draw professionals and students from across the country and from other countries.

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 area of forensic toxicology services is a competitive environment with private and public sectors competing for contracts. The department's Toxicology Laboratory has participated in the competitive bid process for laboratory services for other Medical Examiner jurisdictions and has been successful in being awarded contracts with other counties. Such bids have been competitive with the private sector. Maintaining a competitive edge has been challenged by rising costs of petroleum-based products together with the personnel and operational limitations of the toxicology laboratory.

Our Customers (cont.)

The department serves the residents of Miami-Dade County, 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, UMTB Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, insurance companies, private not-for-profit organizations, law enforcement departments, medical offices and hospitals, funeral homes, and the media.

KEY ISSUES

1. Critical to the department's mission is to obtain sufficient operational and capital funding in order to:

    a. Meet our statutory obligations to the residents of Miami-Dade County, law enforcement, the judiciary, the state of Florida, private industry and the medical and legal communities.
    b. Attract and retain quality employees.
    c. Meet and maintain National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), and American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) accreditation standards.
    d. Remain current with laboratory and investigative technology in order to address continuous, emerging investigative challenges.
    e. Provide in-house and off-site training and educational opportunities for departmental staff to meet emerging investigative challenges.
    f. Maintain and update information technology hardware and software including County network infrastructure.

2. Acquire and implement a software system to effectively manage all aspects of a mass fatality incident.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES

1. Maintain accreditation by NAME, ACGME, and ABFT.
2. Upgrade fiber optic access to the County network to increase efficiency and speed of data exchange.
3. Continue to align staffing allocations with observed work demands in order to better meet departmental objectives.
4. Maintain and improve laboratory instrumentation
    a. Acquire an automated gas chromatograph mass spectrometer to reduce the turnaround time and increase the accuracy of the screening tests using a more efficient and technologically advanced system.
    b. Replace aging laboratory instrumentation to maintain standards and quality of laboratory results.
5. Acquire new Accessible Autopsy Carriers to replace and improve upon aged fiberglass autopsy trays that have begun to decompose due to years of cleaning chemical use and now pose a safety hazard.
6. Replace wooden cooler racks that are beginning to decompose with a more sturdy and resilient solution.
7. Engage our workforce in business plan implementation.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

The top priority of the department is to maintain personnel and operating funding sources to the proper service levels. As a state Medical Examiner Commission mandate, 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 System (FEMORS). As time and our limited budget permits, the department desires to accomplish the following in the next three to five years:

1. Renew and maintain accreditation by NAME, ACGME, and ABFT.
2. Continue a multi-year plan to convert all existing Medical Examiner case files into a state certified, digital database.
3. Complete populating the National Missing and Unidentified Persons system with all available data on Miami-Dade's unidentified decedents.
4. Become a web host for statewide Medical Examiner data management.
5. Utilize GOB funds to finish the renovation of the toxicology laboratory.
6. Replace and upgrade the toxicology laboratory nitrogen generator.
7. Complete a cost study of bringing the Histopathology Lab Services in-house.