



Medical Examiner Department Business Plan

Fiscal Years: 2023 and 2024*
(10/1/2022 through 9/30/2024)

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kenneth D. Hutchins".

Kenneth D. Hutchins, M.D.
Department Director

February 7, 2023

Date

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "J.D. Patterson".

J.D. Patterson
Chief of Corrections and Forensics

2/7/23

Date

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DEPARTMENT OVERVIEW

Department Mission

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

The Department exists to provide statutorily mandated medicolegal death investigative services for the residents of the 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 nearly 17,000 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 County’s ICS provides low-cost disposition for abandoned, unclaimed human remains and for deceased members of indigent 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, Legacy Donor Services Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, law enforcement agencies, religious and civic organizations, medical offices and hospitals, funeral homes, and the media. The Department currently has 91 full-time positions in its various bureaus, which include: The Director’s Office, Pathology/Histology, Toxicology, Administrative Services, and Operations. Within Administrative Services are the Budget and Finance Office, Information Technology, Human Resources, Procurement, and Records. Within Operations are the Morgue, Photography, Investigations, Forensic Evidence Recovery, and ICS.



Table of Organization

	<p>ADMINISTRATION Formulates departmental policies and provides overall direction and coordination to all divisions; oversees fiscal and budgetary operations</p> <p><u>FY 22-23</u> <u>FY 23-24</u> 8 8</p>
	<p>SUPPORT SERVICES Provides internal administrative support to all bureaus and divisions, including personnel administration, budget control, fiscal account management, purchasing, computer services, records management and inventory control</p> <p><u>FY 22-23</u> <u>FY 23-24</u> 12 12</p>
	<p>DEATH INVESTIGATION AND EDUCATION Provides statutorily mandated medicolegal death investigative services for the residents of Miami-Dade County, as defined in the Florida Statutes, Chapter 406; maintains Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) accredited Forensic Pathology Fellowship Program</p> <p><u>FY 22-23</u> <u>FY 23-24</u> 69 69</p>
	<p>INDIGENT CREMATION SERVICES Supervises indigent body disposal program; maintains Dr. Bruce A. Hyma Memorial Cemetery</p> <p><u>FY 22-23</u> <u>FY 23-24</u> 2 2</p>

The FY 2023-24 total number of full-time equivalent positions is 91



Our Customer

The 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 to determine the cause and manner of death as defined in Florida Statute, Chapter 406.

The specialized nature of the 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 contingent on 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 that we engage:

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 records 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 promotes community engagement by hosting forensic seminars, such as the Medicolegal Death Investigation and International Forensic Photography Workshops. These seminars draw professionals and students from across the country and abroad.

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 Department services the residents of the County, many local, state, and federal agencies, including the FBI, NTSB, FAA, State Attorney's and Public Defender's Offices, Life Alliance Organ Procurement, Legacy Donor Services Foundation, Florida Lions Eye Bank, insurance companies, private not-for-profit organizations, law enforcement departments, medical offices, hospitals, funeral homes, and the media.



Strategic Alignment, 4E, and Thrive305 Summary

- I. The Department's mission aligns with the following County Strategic Plan Goals:
 1. Safe Community for all (PS1)
 2. Prevention of avoidable death, injury, and property loss (PS2)
 3. Effective Emergency and Disaster Management (PS3)
 4. Excellent, engaged, and resilient workforce (GG2)
 5. Optimal internal Miami-Dade County operations and service delivery (GG3)
 6. Effective Leadership and Management Practices (GG4)
 7. Safe, healthy, and attractive neighborhoods and communities (NI1)



Departmental Business Plan and Outlook

Department Name: **Medical Examiner**

FY2022-23 & FY2023-24

Strategic Alignment, 4E, and Thrive305 Summary (continued)

CODE	STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES
PS1	Safe Community for all	
PS1-2	Solve crimes quickly, accurately, and in an unbiased manner	Maintain timely evidence collection and investigative services, completion of autopsy protocols, and pending cases, toxicological and histopathological analysis as well as 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 Systems (NamUs.org).
		Provide quality, relevant, and professional training programs.
		Maintain death scene investigative services by certified medicolegal death investigators and medical examiners.
		Continue to repair and/or recapitalize aging equipment to ensure a timely, accurate, and consistent level of quality service to the County, our partners, and our customers.
PS2	Prevention of avoidable death, injury, and property loss	
PS2-1	Minimize response time	Improve Forensic Evidence Recovery Team (FERT) response time.
		Identify new drugs of abuse and chemicals in the community that present potential public health problems that may result in death.
GG2	Excellent, engaged, and resilient workforce	
GG2-1	Attract and hire new talent to support operations	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 of quality medical examiners.
GG2-2	Promote employee development and leadership	Support and maintain required professional certification for histology technician, toxicologists, forensic photographers, and medicolegal death investigators.
		Renew accreditation with Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education.
		Train qualified dentists through the contractual services of the department's forensic odontologist.
GG3	Optimal internal Miami-Dade County operations and service delivery	
GG3-2	Ensure security of systems and data	Purchase specialized advanced analytical instrumentation to identify and measure newly emerging drugs of abuse 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).
		Convert to paperless department with secure and efficient archiving solutions.
		Improve internal chain of custody tracking systems.
		Develop and implement IT solutions to streamline business operations and improve our service to the County, our partners, and our customers.
GG3-4	Effectively utilize and maintain facilities and assets	Replace aging audio-visual system in auditorium to ensure that our revenue-generating seminars continue to meet the highest of educational and training standards.
		Plan, cost estimate, integrate, and execute complex cross-departmental (ITD, ISD, ME) projects such as the operations building electrical panel increase, and toxicology lab infrastructure updates.
GG4	Effective leadership and management practices	
GG4-2	Effectively prioritize, allocate, and use resources to meet the current and future operating and capital needs for all our residents	Amplify existing capacity for the department-wide network storage areas and backup strategies.



KEY ISSUES

1. Critical to the Department's mission is to obtain sufficient operational and capital funding to:
 - a. Meet our statutory obligations to the County residents, 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), American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI), and American Board of Forensic Toxicology (ABFT) accreditation and certification standards.
 - d. Remain current with laboratory and investigative technology 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 to include connectivity and compatibility with the County network infrastructure.
 - g. Recapitalize equipment that has exceeded its natural life span.



PRIORITY INITIATIVES

1. Maintain accreditation and certification by NAME, ACGME, ABMDI, and ABFT.
2. Pursue replacement of existing case management and laboratory information software that will reach end of life after October 14, 2025, and no longer vendor supported.
3. Continue to align staffing allocations with observed work demands and County financial streamline initiatives to better meet departmental objectives.
4. Replace the mini-lab and scanner, DVD duplicator, and alternative light source system (essential to maintain certification standards and day to day operations) due to expiration of manufacturer support in 2021.
5. Replace decomposed wooden cooler shelves with a more sturdier rack system constructed with resilient materials to ensure the safety of our employees while working in the cooler.
6. Collaborate with the Internal Services Department (ISD) to integrate and execute complex multi-departmental projects such as toxicology lab infrastructure upgrades, the induction of new and more efficient laboratory systems, and major renovations.
7. Replace the Department's aging fleet to ensure response capability for forensic evidence recovery and investigative services.
8. Collaborate with ISD to repair and/or replace deteriorating and/or obsolete aspects of our 35-year-old Medical Examiner facility.
9. 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 the state Medical Examiner Commission mandates, 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 Response System (FEMORS). As time and our limited budget permits, the Department desires to accomplish the following in the next three to five years:

- a. Renew and maintain accreditation and certification by NAME, ACGME, ABMDI, and ABFT.
- b. Increase operational staff to further develop the Fellowship Program, implement a patient safety program, and increase scholarly research, as well as effectively manage the increased workload brought on by external factors (increased volume of residents and visitors).
- c. Continue a multi-year plan to convert all existing Medical Examiner case files into a state certified, digital database.
- d. Modernize the toxicology laboratory to include an increase in electric panel power capacity and advanced uninterrupted power supply systems to ensure the fleet of toxicology instrumentation has sufficient and consistent power for operation.
- e. Replace the Department's aging fleet to ensure response capability for forensic evidence recovery and investigative services.
- f. Develop long-term, sustainable solution to ensure the current enterprise Information Technology (IT)/Coroner/Medical Examiner Data System is fully compatible with the INFORMs project and that it provides tailored, dependable support to operations amidst changing trends in IT security and interoperability.
- g. Continue to develop and implement IT solutions to streamline business operations and improve our service to the County, our partners, and our customers.
- h. Renovate the toxicology, histology, and morgue suites to better align with service demands, instrument workflow, and hazardous material storage requirements.
- i. Modernize and beautify the Medical Examiner facility. The facility is 35 years old and a majority of its décor (carpet, flooring, furniture, wall covering, etc.) has not been replaced in nearly two decades.

ATTACHMENT 1

BUSINESS PLAN REPORT

