

# 2021640000—Sheriff-Office of the Medical Examiner

## Law & Justice

Patrick Withrow, Sheriff-Coroner-Public Administrator

| General Fund                     | 2017-2018<br>Actual | 2018-2019<br>Adjusted | 2019-2020<br>Requested | 2019-2020<br>Recommended | Increase/<br>(Decrease) |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Expenditures</b>              |                     |                       |                        |                          |                         |
| Salaries & Benefits              | \$1,337,938         | \$2,596,290           | \$2,632,180            | \$2,632,180              | \$35,890                |
| Services & Supplies              | 1,504,907           | 2,189,347             | 2,162,167              | 2,162,167                | (27,180)                |
| Centrally-Budgeted Expenses      | 48,179              | 73,196                | 358,287                | 358,287                  | 285,091                 |
| <b>Total Appropriations</b>      | <b>\$2,891,024</b>  | <b>\$4,858,833</b>    | <b>\$5,152,634</b>     | <b>\$5,152,634</b>       | <b>\$293,801</b>        |
| <b>Earned Revenues By Source</b> |                     |                       |                        |                          |                         |
| Charges For Services             | \$442,004           | \$377,000             | \$380,000              | \$380,000                | \$3,000                 |
| Miscellaneous Revenues           | 3,915               | 3,000                 | 3,000                  | 3,000                    | 0                       |
| <b>Total Revenues</b>            | <b>\$445,919</b>    | <b>\$380,000</b>      | <b>\$383,000</b>       | <b>\$383,000</b>         | <b>\$3,000</b>          |
| <b>Net County Cost</b>           | <b>\$2,445,105</b>  | <b>\$4,478,833</b>    | <b>\$4,769,634</b>     | <b>\$4,769,634</b>       | <b>\$290,801</b>        |
| <b>Allocated Positions</b>       | <b>10.0</b>         | <b>11.0</b>           | <b>11.0</b>            | <b>11.0</b>              | <b>0.0</b>              |

### Purpose

The Coroner's Division is responsible for determining the circumstances, manner, and cause of all deaths reportable to the Coroner. Field death investigations, postmortem examinations, and related forensic tests are used to establish a medical cause of death. Work is performed by County forensic pathologists with assistance from medical technicians. The technicians assist with autopsies, clean the morgue, take tissue and fluid specimens, and maintain inventories of remains and supplies.

On May 15, 2018, the Board of Supervisors established the Office of the Medical Examiner as a separate division within the Health Care Services Agency (Ordinance No. 4507). The name of the budget has been changed from Coroner/Morgue to Office of the Medical Examiner; however, the narrative references the Coroner's Division, as the Division continues to provide administrative and investigative functions during this transition period.

### Major Budget Changes

#### Salaries & Employee Benefits

- \$35,890 Salary and benefits adjustments.

#### Services & Supplies

- (\$20,000) Decrease in toxicology costs.
- (\$5,000) Decrease in travel and training costs.

#### Centrally-Budgeted Expenses

- \$129,256 Increase in Casualty insurance costs.
- \$36,830 Increase in Workers' Compensation insurance costs.
- \$110,790 Addition of Countywide Cost Allocation Plan charges.

### Program Discussion

The 2019-2020 recommended budget for the Coroner's Division totals \$5,152,634, which is an increase of \$293,801 from the 2018-2019 adjusted budget. This change represents salary and benefits adjustments, increases in allocated insurance costs and the addition of Countywide Cost Allocation Plan charges; partially offset by a decrease in toxicology costs.

# 2021640000—Sheriff-Office of the Medical Examiner

## Law & Justice

Initially budgeted in 2018-2019, the recommended budget continues to include \$2.0 million for anticipated expenses due to the separation of the Coroner's Division from the Sheriff's Office, and the creation of an independent Medical Examiner's Office. This amount includes staff, operating, and equipment costs recommended in the Consultant's review, with the exception of the Chief Administrator position.

During 2018-2019, the Coroner's Office began a project to remove 5,678 cremains currently stored in the morgue's columbarium to a permanent resting place in a public cemetery at a cost of \$198,730. It is anticipated that the relocation will be complete in spring 2020.

The Coroner's Office continues to rely on private pathology contractors for autopsy services after the loss of in-house pathologists. As of midyear, autopsy costs are projected to exceed budget in 2018-2019 by \$256,189. No provisions have been made to the Coroner's 2019-2020 budget to pay the higher cost of private forensic pathology contractors.

In September 2017, the Coroner's Office began a pilot program, temporarily reassigning two Deputy Sheriffs from the Patrol Division to the Coroner's Office full-time, allowing the Coroner's Office to respond to the field to handle Coroner investigations Monday through Friday from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm, freeing up Patrol deputies to handle

other calls for service. Data collected from the first year of the program (September 2017 through August 2018) shows a reduction in average response time from 45 minutes to 27 minutes and completion times for Coroner's investigations from 317 minutes to 99 minutes.

### Office of the Medical Examiner

On May 15, 2018, the Board adopted an ordinance establishing the Office of the Medical Examiner as a separate division within the Health Care Services Agency.

The County Administrator has taken the lead, along with County Counsel, to develop an organizational plan for the independent Medical Examiner's Office. The transition period is anticipated to take up to 24 months. In the interim, all administrative and investigative functions will continue to be executed by staff of the Sheriff-Coroner's Office, until the Medical Examiner's Office is fully staffed and prepared to assume those duties. However, the authority of determining the cause and manner of death will be assigned to the Medical Examiner, once appointed.

The Board has interviewed highly-qualified candidates for the position of Chief Medical Examiner. It is anticipated that a final selection will be made by the end of June 2019. In addition, recruitments are ongoing for full-time forensic pathologists.

### Workload Data

|                                | -----Actual----- |           |           |                        |                        |
|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------|-----------|------------------------|------------------------|
|                                | 2015-2016        | 2016-2017 | 2017-2018 | Est./Act.<br>2018-2019 | Projected<br>2019-2020 |
| <i>Cases Reported</i>          | 2,605            | 2,821     | 2,798     | 2,548                  | 2,693                  |
| <i>Actual Coroner Cases</i>    | 727              | 798       | 839       | 780                    | 786                    |
| <i>Postmortem Examinations</i> | 661              | 710       | 751       | 676                    | 700                    |