

Appropriations Hearing

February 21, 2023

Testimony of Dr. James Gill, Chief Medical Examiner Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME)

The OCME continues to see an increase in death investigations (Table 1 and Figures 1 and 2). We regularly investigate deaths that pose a threat to public safety and public health. The information and data generated from our OCME investigations are used to promote and improve the health of Connecticut residents. In addition to investigating deaths, we also partner with, and rapidly alert, various stakeholders when a cluster of overdose deaths occurs; we participate in a plethora of mortality review panels statewide; we educate medical providers and students about the role of the Medical Examiner; and we testify to our findings throughout all the courts in the State.

OCME investigations are increasing, labor intensive, and comprehensive occurring at unpredictable times and locations which impacts all aspects of our day-to-day operations. Fiscally, this translates into more costs for the agency including the transportation of remains, laboratory testing and supplies, toxicology testing, histology examinations, report transcription, and, on the personnel line, costs for overtime and nights, weekend, and holiday coverage. We utilize overtime to maintain our 24/7/365 operations.

The persistent increases in death investigations continue to strain our office staff and budget. With the use of intermittent grants, new efficiencies, and per diem staff, we have worked to meet these challenges administratively in order to perform high quality death investigations. Despite our best efforts to stay within budget, we continue to realize a deficiency each year due to being very lean at baseline in both personnel and operating expenses.

With this marked work increase, we also have outgrown our facility space which results in additional fiscal burdens (e.g., storage trailers). Due to these facility issues, our national accreditation status was downgraded to provisional. We appreciate that our facilities issues have been recognized by the State and we are in the earliest stages of working with an architect to determine the best options for facility growth / expansion.

Our accreditation status also hinges on having the appropriate number of Medical Examiner Physicians to handle the volume of autopsies to be performed. NAME has recommended that OCME be staffed with another Medical Examiner, which we requested and which has been reflected in the Governor's proposed budget. The addition of this Medical Examiner will allow for improved turnaround times for our autopsy reports and death certifications.

We require a budget that fully funds our personnel expenses with added support to differential pay and overtime, and a budget that fully covers our operating expenses for an increasing number of investigations. The Governor's proposed budget offers needed support with an

incremental increase of our operating expenditures. Our staff members give 110% and work very hard to stay true to our mission of thorough and timely death investigations, while actively sharing public health information, and participating in panels and outreach that promotes health and safety.

Thank you for your support and the opportunity to address the Committee. I am available to answer any questions.

Table 1. Calendar Year OCME Investigation Trends:

	<u>2014</u>	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Total Deaths in CT	29,916	30,606	30,654	31,556	31,468	31,941	38,122	34,773	34,768
Deaths Reported to OCME	19,540	20,652	21,048	22,017	22,484	23,183	30,137	27,214	27,285
Cremation Investigations	15,697	16,687	17,169	17,945	18,285	19,529	23,848	22,073	22,662
Death Certificates Issued	2,957	3,558	3,569	3,749	3,957	4,194	5,619	5,500	5,593
Postmortem Examinations	2,179	2,624	2,728	2,732	2,887	3,177	3,542	3,787	3,847
Autopsies Performed	1,717	2,227	2,379	2,348	2,471	2,768	2,932	3,205	3,131
Drug Intoxication Deaths	558	729	917	1,038	1,017	1,200	1,374	1,524	Pending**
Homicides	104	129	87	124	98	120	157	167	153**

** as of February 15, 2023

Figure 1.

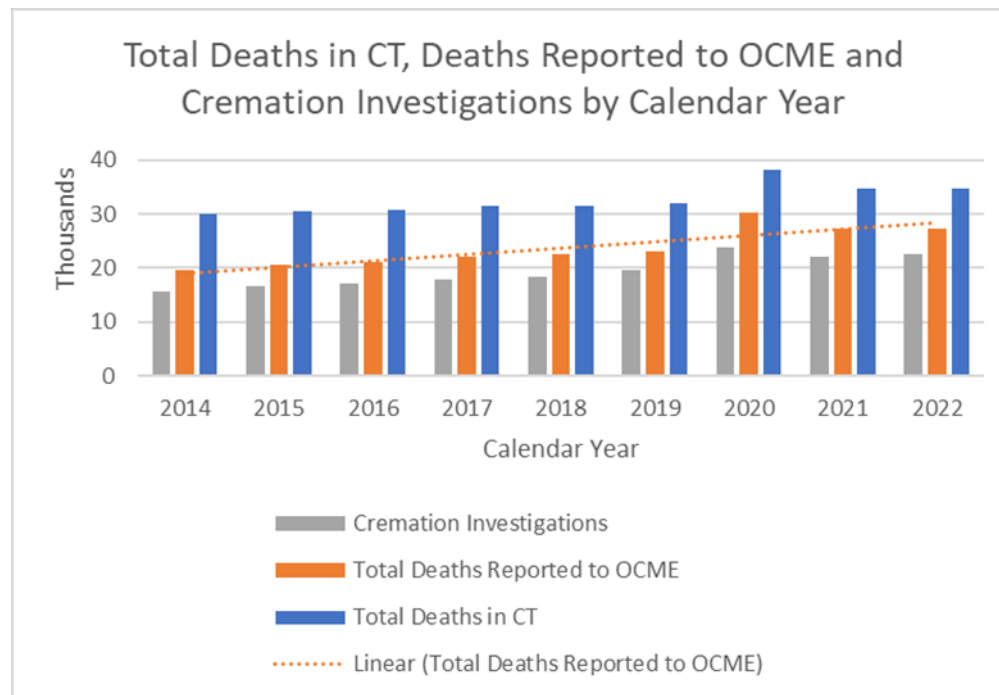


Figure 2.

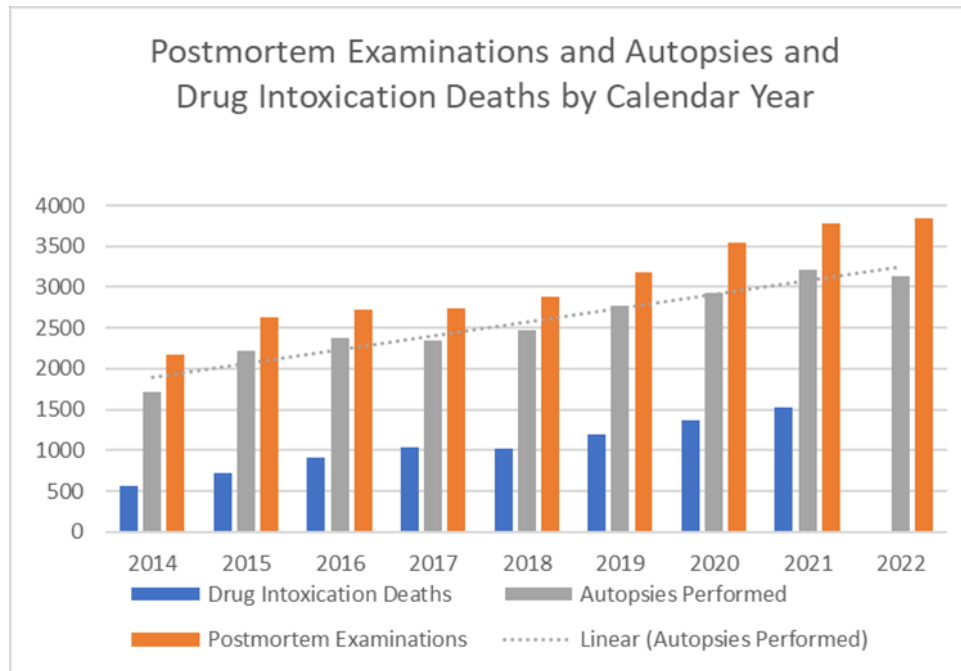


Table 2. OCME Staffing by Fiscal Year:

	<u>FY20</u>	<u>FY21</u>	<u>FY22</u>	<u>FY23</u>	<u>Current vacancies</u>	<u>Proposed FY24</u>	<u>Proposed FY25</u>
Full Time Allotted and Funded	51	52	63	63	(-6)	+1 (64)	64
Part Time Funded Count	21	21	30	27	(-3)	27	27
Unfunded Positions	0	0	0	0		0	0
Total	72	73	93	90	(-9)	91	91

Table 3. Fiscal Year Actuals, Appropriations and Proposed Appropriations

	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Approp</u>	<u>Deficiency</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Approp</u>	<u>Projected</u>	<u>Gov</u>	<u>Gov</u>
<u>Account</u>	<u>FY20</u>	<u>FY21</u>	<u>FY22</u>	<u>FY22</u>	<u>FY22</u>	<u>FY23</u>	<u>Expense</u>	<u>Recommend</u>	<u>Recommend</u>
Personal Services	\$5,837,460	\$6,285,120	\$6,669,156	\$188,122	\$6,857,278	\$8,250,313	\$8,375,113	\$8,561,135	\$8,666,281
Other Expenses	\$1,160,340	\$1,286,754	\$1,534,987	\$95,540	\$1,630,527	\$1,878,987	\$2,073,987	\$2,104,257	\$2,104,257
Equipment	\$23,310	\$22,636	\$23,310	\$0	\$22,569	\$23,310	\$23,310	\$29,213	\$24,846
Medicolegal Investigations	\$22,141	\$21,992	\$22,150	\$0	\$22,150	\$22,150	\$22,150	\$22,150	\$22,150
Total:	<u>\$7,043,251</u>	<u>\$7,616,502</u>	<u>\$8,249,603</u>	<u>\$283,662</u>	<u>\$8,532,524</u>	<u>\$10,174,760</u>	<u>\$10,494,560</u>	<u>\$10,716,755</u>	<u>\$10,817,534</u>

Table 4. Fiscal Year OCME Generated General Fund Revenue

<u>Types of General Fund Revenue</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	<u>Half 2023</u>
Cremation Investigations Fees	\$2,520,707	\$2,622,670	\$2,690,224	\$2,766,902	\$3,261,100	\$3,307,385	\$3,491,215	\$1,955,450
Medical Records Fees	\$29,954	\$48,980	\$57,258	\$54,456	\$55,724	\$60,349	\$57,745	\$30,499
Civil Witness Fees						\$450		
Legal Billing	\$777	\$3,145	\$4,125	\$1,250	\$3,564	\$4,432	\$3,952	\$600
Total by Year	<u>\$2,550,661</u>	<u>\$2,671,650</u>	<u>\$2,747,482</u>	<u>\$2,821,358</u>	<u>\$3,316,824</u>	<u>\$3,368,184</u>	<u>\$3,548,960</u>	<u>\$1,985,949</u>