

**Appropriations Committee**  
**Deficiency Hearing**  
*April 13, 2021*

**Testimony of Dr. James Gill, Chief Medical Examiner, OCME**

Good afternoon distinguished members of the appropriations committee. I am James Gill, Chief Medical Examiner. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to describe our current financial situation.

We have a projected total deficiency of \$485,950 in Personal Services (PS). Our projected deficiency is related to the Covid-19 pandemic, our current large increase in case load which is unpredictable, and the enacted budget for FY 2021 did not recognize the increase in workload and associated staffing costs, particularly in the areas of overtime and shift differentials paid to those who work during the overnight hours.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is a 24/7/365 day agency and the only agency in the State that performs medicolegal death investigation. We provide an essential core service and are bound by statute to investigate all deaths that are unexpected, suspicious, unnatural, or a threat to the public health.

Our current large increases in reported deaths and cremations are related to the COVID-19 pandemic but even without this, we have seen continuous annual growth in our work (Table 1). In addition to the COVID-19 deaths in 2020 and 2021, we have seen a 30% increase in homicides and 13% increase in drug intoxication deaths. Fiscally, this translates into more costs for the agency including transportation of remains, laboratory and supply needs, and overtime in order to keep up with the day to day volume of death investigations.

Despite these increases, the OCME has been able to successfully meet the COVID-19 challenges even though the total number of full-time positions at the OCME has remained at 50 for the past 4 years. We have made careful reorganizations and investments in electronic improvements so that, despite these personnel challenges, our staff is still able to provide quality and timely service and meet national accreditation turn-around-time requirements. We do not expect the number of death investigations to decrease and see continued challenges in the future.

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

**Table 1 Summary of OCME Workload.**

	<b><u>FY2017</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2018</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2019</u></b>	<b><u>FY 2020</u></b>
Total Accessioned Cases	21,750	22,148	22,748	27,959
Total Certified Deaths	3,698	3,728	4,145	5,050
Total Autopsies	2,402	2,382	2,525	2,908
Cremation Investigation	17,917	18,269	19,058	22,630
Cremation Revenue (\$150 per)	\$2,621,000	\$2,690,000	\$2,778,255	\$3,260,950
	<b><u>CY2017</u></b>	<b><u>CY2018</u></b>	<b><u>CY2019</u></b>	<b><u>CY2010</u></b>
Drug Intoxication Deaths	1,038	1,017	1,200	1,374
Homicides	124	98	120	157