



Jefferson County Coroner Office

**Barbara Weakley-Jones MD
Coroner**



**BINGHAM BUILDING
10511 LAGRANGE RD
Louisville, KY 40233**

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www.louisvilleky.gov/coroner

Historical Perspectives:

The Jefferson County Coroner's Office covers the 16th largest population in the United States. It was established in 1780. In 2009, Dr. Barbara Weakley-Jones was appointed Coroner. She then won the election in 2010 to become the first female elected to the office of Coroner. Dr. Weakley-Jones mission reflects her philosophy that her deputies are educated in medicine and death investigations with primary goal of determining the cause and manner of death.

The coroner's office always had a morgue and we shared with the ME when they started in 1977.

1st The General Hospital

2nd University Hospital

3rd 810 Barret Ave. 2016

4th 10511 LaGrange Rd in 2017 the Morgue is owned by ME office and we pay for 6 spaces at their facility

Statutory Requirements:

Kentucky Statute mandates the Coroner's Office to determine the cause and manner of deaths in medical/legal related deaths "coroner's cases." The *Cause of Death* is the injury, disease, or a combination of the two that cause the death of the person. The *Manner of Death* is ruled by the Coroner to be natural, suicidal, accidental, homicide, unknown, or pending further investigation.

Kentucky law does not recognize the right to refuse an autopsy ordered by the coroner. Autopsies are preformed to answer medical and legal questions to protect public health and aid in legal issues.

The Coroner's Office deals with many kinds of death, such as:

- Skeletal remains
- Homicides
- Accidental death
- Death in a correctional or state owned Facilities
- Childhood deaths
- Motor vehicle, train and plane deaths
- Disasters
- Suicides
- Natural deaths in the young
- Drowning deaths
- Fire deaths
- Cremations

Death Scene Investigation:

The Coroner or Deputy has the responsibility of pronouncing death. In addition to: determining the time of death, taking custody of both the body and property on the body, ensuring the body has not been moved from the original death scene, making a positive identification of the body, notifying the next of kin, signing the death certificate, completing required forms and records for each death investigation, and collaborating with other appropriate agencies.

The Coroner/ Deputies act as a liaison between the police, the Medical Examiner's Office and the family in the investigation of various types of death in the community.

The Deputies are continually involved in courses, which aid in their work. Deputies are mandated to attend yearly training sessions.

Postmortem examination

A postmortem examination is required for all coroner's cases however that does not mean that an autopsy is performed on all cases.

The Autopsy

An autopsy is an examination of the body to determine the cause and manner of death. It is performed by the state medical examiner not the coroner. Small specimens of internal organs are microscopically examined along with body fluids tested for drugs. In violent deaths, other evidence may be collected and examined by a crime laboratory.

The autopsy and other tests rarely delay the release of the body however, final results of the autopsy report usually takes 6-8 weeks. Death certificates are signed after receiving the autopsy reports.

During the autopsy, all *property* and *clothing* are generally handled by the Medical Examiner and released with the body to the funeral home except in homicide or undetermined cases where those items get released to the law enforcement agency.

The Coroner's Office services and programs:

Indigent Program - The Indigent Program was established for the homeless and destitute without any next of kin who reside in Jefferson county. Each year more than 200 homeless or indigent persons die in our community with no family or resources. When a relative or other legal representative applies for a county burial or cremation, the Coroner's Office has an application process with an interview. The Coroner evaluates the request and needs of each situation, and the resources are explored (insurance, savings, Social Security, retirement, Veteran benefits, etc) to determine eligibility of the person.

The Coroner's Office is also proud to have a nonprofit program **“Be a Memory Maker”** that takes donations to raise money to purchase grave markers for individuals buried through the indigent program

The Coroner's Office believes firmly in service to the community and is committed to providing a permanent marker for the indigent people to acknowledge their time on earth.

Jefferson County Coroner's Office

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graph TD; A[Jefferson County Coroner's Office] --> B[Coroner  
Barbara Weakley-Jones MD]; B --> C[Administrative  
deputy  
coroners]; B --> D[Indigent  
Program]; B --> E[Rotating  
deputies]; C --> C1[Morgan Murphy  
(Cremations)  
Kim Smith( IT)]; D --> D1[Morgan Murphy  
Kim Smith]; E --> E1[JoAnn Farmer  
Jackie Smith  
Jeff Wheeler  
Kathy Hamilton  
Scott Russ  
Mike Haag]; E --> E2[Charles Edelen  
Anthony Wight  
Jerry Zehnder  
Mark Wampler  
Steve Moran  
Wayne Pryse];
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Coroner
Barbara Weakley-Jones MD

**Administrative
deputy
coroners**

Morgan Murphy
(Cremations)
Kim Smith(IT)

**Indigent
Program**

Morgan Murphy
Kim Smith

**Rotating
deputies**

JoAnn Farmer
Jackie Smith
Jeff Wheeler
Kathy Hamilton
Scott Russ
Mike Haag

Charles Edelen
Anthony Wight
Jerry Zehnder
Mark Wampler
Steve Moran
Wayne Pryse

The Coroner's office Since 1977

The office has had the same number of rotating deputies (9) until 2 yrs. ago when I finally received 2 additional rotating deputies, then lost one in 2019

We have one less staff person since 2011

No major increase in pay except for cost of living raises.

There has been a marked increase in homicide and drug overdose cases.

Coroner statistics

- Number cases each year

- | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 5,442 | 6,196 | 6,534 | 6,178 |

- Average bodies in morgue are 5-10 daily

2019 statistics

- Numbers of cases 6,178
- Number of scene investigation 5,104
- 12 cases per 24hr period
- Average 5-10 bodies in morgue per day, some stay in morgue for 2-3 wks.

Types of cases 2019

• Homicide	127
• Natural	3873
• Accident	328
• Suicide	147
• Accident(drugs)	360
• ER call in	409
• Hospitarus	665
• Cremations	3131

2020 statistics to date (April)

- Numbers of cases to date 2753
- Number of scene investigations 1,901
- 12 cases per 24hr period
- Average 5-10 bodies in morgue per day, some stay in morgue for 2-3 wks.

Types of cases 2020 to date

• Homicide	50
• Natural	1495
• Accident	88
• Suicide	46
• Accident(drugs)	132
• ER call in	156
• Hospitarus	684
• Cremations	1153

Our rotating deputies rotate on a 24hr period starting at 9am in the morning until 9am the next morning, then off 72 hours. They get paid a yearly fee no matter how many cases they do a year or hours they work.

They get no counted **vacation** or **sick leave**. They get no **overtime pay** even though they are never finished at 9 am the next day.

They **drive their own personal vehicles** over 10,000.00 miles per year per deputy

What have they done to the Coroner's Office?

- They have had taken out of my budget \$65,000.00 which required to layoff one deputy coroner.
I had to move the deputy from the indigent program to a rotating deputy.
- I cannot afford to lose a single deputy in order to keep this community working in a timely manner and cover our entire community.
- This will delay EMS and Police at scenes, since they must stay there until the deputy gets there.

The Major cost for the Coroner's Office

- Contract services (body transport and indigent program)
- Body transport cost average \$250,000
- The indigent program average \$100,000
- Miscellaneous revenue

\$12-19,000 from Coroner and MECAP reports and reimbursement for some indigent services

Indigent program 2019

- Cremations 43
- Burials 63
- There are less than 68 spaces left in cemetery for burials

Indigent program 2020

- Cremations 6
- Burials 14
- There are less than 36 spaces left in cemetery for burials
- Still do not have additional land for burials



WHAT HAS BEEN DONE TO MAKE THE OFFICE MORE EFFECIENT AND SAVE MONEY

- Re-wrote and updated the Coroner's Manuel for the coroner's association.

Made a pamphlet for the coroner's office and the police department to hand out at a death scene.

I personally provide 24hr coverage, 7 days a week to the deputies and LMPD for specific needs and for determining whether a bone found is **human** or **nonhuman**

I personally provide Metro LMPD **my K-9 services of HRD dogs** to find missing persons or collect scattered skeletal remains at no cost to the county.

What you do not know about the coroner's office

- Coroner's and Deputy coroners are sworn police officers yet not treated as such.
- They are **not** considered **hazardous duty** yet go to scenes when violence is still happening and are exposed to biohazards daily. Civilian CSU employees, and tow truck drivers are considered hazardous duty besides police, EMS and fire.
- Hazardous pay would cost \$78,000.00 per year

What you do not know continued

- Coroners and deputy coroners do **not** get **sick time, vacation time** or **overtime**
- IF we got sick time it would cost 7,200.00 per year.
- If we got overtime like the police and fire, it would cost 8,400.00 or more.
- If we got vacation time it would cost 6,000.00 per year.
- I do not know of another Metro agency that does not get these benefits.
- To be honest, this is probably illegal but it was set up this way before I became Coroner.

What you do not know continued

- They drive their own cars and have to pay their own insurance. They only get a gas stipend. No coverage for wear and tear on car, maintenance, tires or accidents.
- If they get a flat tire or get stuck in snow or mud, they cannot get help from the metro tow trucks, yet are on metro work.
- They have to buy their own emergency lights, gun, ammunition and clothing which often gets contaminated. I begged for bullet proof vests and received the discarded ones from LMPD.

What you do not know continued

LMPD Homicide has about 28 Det's, Sgt's and Lt. assigned to homicide. They open about 850 cases a year. LMPD Traffic Unit has approximately 14 officers/Sgts./Lt. that investigate an average of 100 fatal collisions and pedestrian deaths per year. SO, LMPD has about 42 people assigned to homicide and traffic that investigate 950 cases, only about 500 are deaths and the other 450 are living shooting victims.

Jefferson County Coroner opens 2800 cases (scenes, hospice reports, cremations, ER naturals and Indigent burials) with 12 street deputies and 3 office deputies. Homicide, traffic and coroners go to the same murders, suicides, accidental deaths, overdoses, fatal collision/pedestrians' deaths etc.

The coroner's office does three times the case load but LMPD and Traffic have three times the staff than we do. If we compare scenes only, we are doing twice the cases and they have three times the staff as us. We cannot lose any more deputy positions.

Coroner office update

extra morgue storage
has been achieved
with stackable Gurneys

- Contract with the state has been signed
- Contract agreement with security has been signed



Coroner's office needs

- Need secretary position \$30,160.00
- Request the annual % raise if given
- Acquire more land for the indigent program
- Keep the same number of deputies that we have now
- Increase postal mail money to \$800.00 for certified mailing
- The contract with Owen stays the same
- The contract with body removal increases \$5.00 per bag
- Coroner's car is 15yrs old and has not been replaced but need 4-wheel SUV that is big enough for dog crates and towing a trailer.

Forensic Investigation Team Doc & Dogs

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K-9's

Abracadaver,, Rayna &

Trevor

HRD Land & Water

Handler

Barbara Weakley-Jones, MD

Final Plea

- I have saved the Metro government thousands of dollars over the years.
- I cannot give up a deputy position to save \$65,000.00 and do an adequate job for Jefferson County. At every death scene an EMS and LMPD officer is required until a deputy gets there. Less deputies would increase the time that they respond to a scene
- I also cannot ask my deputies to do anymore overtime than they already doing and not get paid for it.