



Jefferson County Coroner Office

**Barbara Weakley-Jones MD
Coroner**



**BINGHAM BUILDING
10511 LAGRANGE RD
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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[Cindy Thoene  
(Cremations)  
Kim Smith( IT)]; D --> D1[JoAnn farmer(Chief  
deputy)]; E --> E1[Larry Carroll  
Jackie Smith  
Jeff Wheeler  
Kathy Hamilton  
Scott Russ  
Mike Haag]; E --> E2[Charles Edelen  
Anthony Wight  
David Wood  
Mark Wampler  
Steve Moran  
Wayne Pryse];
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Coroner
Barbara Weakley-Jones MD

**Administrative
deputy
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Cindy Thoene
(Cremations)
Kim Smith(IT)

**Indigent
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JoAnn farmer(Chief
deputy)

**Rotating
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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.

We have one less staff person than in 2011
No major increase in pay except for cost of living raises.

After receiving 2 additional deputies, I rearranged the office and had to change some policies so we could handle the load of cases

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

Coroner statistics

- Number cases each year

- | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 |
|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| 4,723 | 4,924 | 5,442 | 6,196 | 6,534 |

That is an average increase of over 500 cases in the last several years

- Average bodies in morgue are 5 daily with only 6 spots allowed in the ME morgue and 4 in freezer

2018 statistics

- Numbers of cases 6,534
- Number of scene investigation 4,270
- 12 cases per 24hr period
- Average 5 bodies in morgue per day, some stay in morgue for 2-3 wks.

Types of cases 2018

• Homicide	102
• Natural	955
• Accident	299
• Suicide	144
• Accident(drugs)	299
• ER call in	356
• Hosparus	1249
• Cremations	2835

2019 statistics to date (April)

- Numbers of cases to date 1,928
- Number of scene investigations 1,674
- 12 cases per 24hr period
- Average 5 bodies in morgue per day, some stay in morgue for 2-3 wks.

Types of cases 2019 to date

- Homicide 60
- Natural 99
- Accident 99
- Suicide 51
- Accident(drugs) 102
- ER call in 159
- Hospitarus 372
- Cremations 985

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

Worked my scheduled shift from 9:00 am on 5/5 – 9:00 am on 5/6.

5/06/2019 was a scheduled off day but below you will find my work related task performed throughout the day

9:00 am -10:00 Completing paperwork, attempting to locate next of kin for decedent and making notification to KODA

11:17 am – 11:27 Text from and responding to Kim in reference to decedent's family member at office

11:34 am – 11:40 Phone call to decedent's brother

Multiple checks throughout the day of Morgue Census for preliminary results and release of decedents so I could notify families

2:19 pm Phone call and message to decedent's mother

2:20 pm – 2:28 Phone call and conversation to decedent's stepfather

2:29 pm Phone call to LMPD Sergeant Schardein reference overdose death

2:30 pm – 2:34 Phone call to DEA Task Force reference information received from decedent's family and cell phone involved in suspected overdose death

2:36 pm Phone call and message to decedent's mother reference preliminary autopsy results and release of body

9:54 pm Received message and returned phone call to decedent's mother

Email to media outlets reference identification of victim involved in motor vehicle collision

What have they done to the Coroner's Office?

- They have had taken out of my budget \$65,000.00.
- This is equal to one deputy coroner's salary.
- 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 have to 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 2018

- Cremations 52
- Burials 126
- There are less than 118 spaces left in cemetery for burials

Indigent program 2019

- Cremations 12
- Burials 32
- There are less than 86 spaces left in cemetery for burials



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

- Laid off two administrative positions and taken over their responsibilities
- Use stickers on old envelopes and stationary
- Updated Policies and Procedure manual in office
- Worked with GLMS to educate and provide a flow chart for ER doctors to avoid unnecessary coroner calls
- Lectured to hospitals on what is a coroner's case

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.

Provided Hosparus a check list to send to us instead of calling us at all hours of the day and night.

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 non human

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/Sgt's./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 coroners 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. THIS IS JUST NOT LOGICAL. And they want to take one of our 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 office needs

- Need secretary position \$30,160.00
- Acquire more land for the indigent program
- Training for certified medicolegal death investigators \$250.00 per person x14 (\$3,500.00).
- Overtime pay (at least) 8,400.00
- Coroner's car is 14yrs old and has not been replaced, but need 4 wheel SUV that is big enough for dog crates and towing a trailer.
- Get coroner/me system working on the computers

What the Coroner's Office has saved Metro Government each **year** for the past 10 yrs.

- No hazardous Pay \$78,000/yr.
- No paid vacation days \$6,000/yr.
- No Overtime pay \$8,400/yr.
- No paid sick days \$7,200/yr.
- No assigned vehicles \$264,000(12 deputies)
- Maintenance on vehicles \$19,200/yr./vehicle
total\$ 230,400
- Total saved **\$594,000.00**

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. This would increase the time that they are at a scene also.
- I also cannot ask my deputies to do anymore work (overtime) than they already doing and not get paid for it.