

Issue Brief – Medical Examiner

HEALTH - EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S OPERATIONS

DOH IB 08-03

SUMMARY

The Office of the Medical Examiner (OME) is responsible for the investigation and certification of sudden and/or unexpected deaths that occur within the borders of the State. The specific circumstances surrounding any given death which place it under the jurisdiction of the OME are specified in UCA 26-4-7.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this building block funding request is to address the chronic operating shortfall within the Office of the Medical Examiner.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The Office of the Medical Examiner is involved to a varying degree in approximately 25 percent of all deaths in Utah each year. The Office collects data on every case under its jurisdiction that can be used to understand the health hazards that cause and contribute to mortality in the State. The OME provides information and expertise to health care providers, EMT's, law enforcement officials, the courts and attorneys concerning issues relating to death and injury within Utah.

Caseload Growth

The overall caseload has been relatively flat, slightly increasing, since FY 2002. It continues to grow with the population and demographics of the state. While the overall case numbers have been relatively flat, the number of cases requiring examination have gone up 3% to 5% a year. A statutory change in FY 2001 also added to the workload. It requires the Medical Examiner to investigate deaths that are a result of highway accidents. Funding to address this additional responsibility and workload has been shifted from other programs within the Executive Director's Operation when ever funds are available. Ongoing funding building blocks have not been a part of the budget increases outlined in these tables and charts. The 2006 Legislature did shift \$70,000 one-time General Fund from Medical Assistance to make up the shortfall for FY 2006. No new ongoing funding was appropriated other than the compensation adjustment.

Contributing Factors to Financial Need

The Medical Examiner's operating shortfall is primarily the result of three items:

- Body Transportation Costs – Contractual service fees have increased 41.2 percent over the last five years and 81.4 percent over the last 8 years.
- Medical Supply Costs – Medical supply costs for the office have increased over \$20,000 since 2002.
- Overtime Costs – The OME caseload has steadily increased an average of 5 percent a year since 2000. (See Budget Brief BB DOH 08-02 and the Health Compendium of Budgetary Information for the 2007 General Session, November 21, 2006, pages 8 and 9.) This growth rate is estimated to continue due to Utah's demographics.

Financial History

The table below details the funding and expenditures history for the Office from FY 2000 through the current fiscal year. The positive "Lapsing Balance" reflects the shifting of funds from other programs within the Executive Director's Operations line item to address the annual funding needs within the OME. The 2006 Legislature appropriated \$70,000 one-time funding to address the funding shortfall for FY 2006. No new additional ongoing funding was appropriated for FY 2007, except for the Personal Services compensation adjustment.

Financing	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	2006 Estimated	FY 2007 Approp
General Fund	\$1,619,700	\$1,778,200	\$1,770,400	\$1,952,100	\$1,940,600	\$2,052,700
General Fund, One-time	167,800	0	4,300	0	70,000	(4,900)
Dedicated Credits						
Revenue	66,470	88,936	85,759	77,100	89,200	82,300
Lapsing Balance	(20,012)	53,220	97,478	0	0	0
TOTAL	\$1,833,958	\$1,920,356	\$1,957,937	\$2,029,200	\$2,099,800	\$2,130,100
Percent Change		4.71%	1.96%	3.64%	3.48%	1.44%

Expenditures	FY 2002	FY 2003	FY 2004	FY 2005	2006 Estimated	FY 2007 Approp
Personal Services	\$1,317,622	\$1,371,481	\$1,399,989	\$1,462,700	\$1,369,300	\$1,562,500
In-State Travel	5,414	3,292	3,021	2,900	3,500	3,200
Out of State Travel	1,626	0	1,211	0	1,300	1,300
Current Expense	476,358	537,618	543,184	548,700	715,500	547,400
DP Current Expense	31,966	7,965	10,532	13,800	10,200	15,700
DP Capital Outlay	0	0	0	0	0	0
Capital Outlay	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other Charges/Pass Thru	972	0	0	1,100	0	0
TOTAL	\$1,833,958	\$1,920,356	\$1,957,937	\$2,029,200	\$2,099,800	\$2,130,100
Percent Change		4.71%	1.96%	3.64%	3.48%	1.44%

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Recommendation

The Analyst recommends that the Subcommittee approve ongoing funding of \$270,000 General Fund for FY 2008 to address the increased workload growth and increased costs. This will provide funding for additional contracts and transportation costs. Without additional funding, the Medical Examiner may have to reduce hours of service, thereby increasing the time to perform the necessary investigations and autopsies. This would delay the time a family would be able to obtain the body for final disposition.

Alternative Recommendation: The Analyst recommends that the Medical Examiner evaluate the current fee structure to determine if fees could be increased.

Supplemental Appropriation Recommendation

In conjunction with the FY 2008 appropriation recommendation made above, the Analyst recommends that the Subcommittee approve a Supplemental Appropriation of \$112,000 one-time General Fund for FY 2007. This will enable the Office of the Medical Examiner to continue current operations without requiring a shift of funds from other programs within the Department.