



To: Honorable County Council Members
Honorable Steve Ehlmann, County Executive

February 2, 2018

A review of the Medical Examiner's Office through a contract between the County and St. Louis University was conducted by the County Auditor's Office. The review is complete and the final report is being issued today. The results of our review are detailed in the attached report.

The analysis was conducted in accordance with the *International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing*, and consisted of examining sufficient evidence to afford a reasonable basis for our findings. Since this was a special review, rather than a departmental audit, management responses are not necessary; however, the current status of the items has been added.

In our opinion, except for the opportunities included in this report, internal controls were adequate and services were provided in compliance with the contract terms.

If you have any questions or concerns pertaining to the observations or recommendations included in this report, please feel free to call me.

Brent Statler

Brent Statler, County Auditor

Attachment

Copy to: Joann Leykam, Director of Administration
Dr. Mary Case, St. Charles County Medical Examiner

Background

The mission of the Saint Charles County Medical Examiner's Office is to determine the cause and manner of death in all sudden, violent and suspicious deaths occurring in Saint Charles County and to disseminate the investigative, autopsy and toxicological results as warranted.

The Medical Examiner's Office is committed to responding to the needs of the community and contributing to the wellbeing and safety of the citizens of St. Charles County by being the first alert to deaths that have been caused by violence, hazards, dangers, and infectious diseases. The Medical Examiner's Office has jurisdiction over certain classes of dead bodies as described in RSMo 58.720. Reporting a death to the Medical Examiner does not necessarily mean that the Medical Examiner will assume jurisdiction for that death or respond to the scene of death. Reporting of deaths assures that appropriate deaths will be assessed by the Medical Examiner's Office and evaluation as to whether investigation by the Medical Examiner is warranted.

The Chief Medical Examiner is a board certified Forensic Pathologist who is appointed by the St. Charles County Executive to investigate sudden, unexpected, suspicious, unnatural or violent deaths. The purpose of the Medical Examiner Program is to utilize the knowledge of the forensic sciences and medicine to investigate deaths that constitute a concern to the public health and safety.

The Medical Examiner's Office is under the direction of the Chief Medical Examiner through authority vested in the Division of Forensic Pathology of Saint Louis University by set contract between St. Charles County and Saint Louis University. In addition to the Chief Medical Examiner, the University employs three full-time and part-time employees currently assigned to St. Charles County who also work on similar contracts for Jefferson and Franklin Counties. In addition to two of the full-time employees mentioned above, the Medical Examiner's Office utilizes part-time Medicolegal Death Investigators (DI) to work the evening shift and some off-hour shifts. Medicolegal Death Investigators conduct initial investigations by visiting the scene or having conversations with the person (Nursing Home, Hospital, Hospice provider, Law Enforcement and/or Fire/Ambulance service) reporting the death. Since deaths occur around the clock, the Medical Examiner and medicolegal investigative staff members are available 24 hours a day, 365 days per year. The DI's determine whether to accept jurisdiction, release the body to family (funeral home), or transfer jurisdiction to a different County. If jurisdiction is accepted, then the body will be transported to the Medical Examiner's Office for the proper examination and testing to determine the cause of death. In addition to issuing death certificates for all accepted causes, the Medical Examiner will review cases and sign the death certificates or any resident death that a primary physician will not sign.

The Medical Examiner's Office, through contracts or affiliation with St. Louis University, has access to a Mortuary (and staff), a Forensic Toxicology Lab, and special professional services including: Forensic Radiology, Forensic Dentistry, Forensic Anthropology, Forensic Botany, Forensic Entomology, Forensic Clinical Chemistry, Forensic Microbiology and Histology Services. A local mortuary provides body transportation services. In addition to the above listed services, the Medical Examiner provides Forensic Neuropathology services.

Funding and Statistics

Funding						
Year	Contract \$	Covered Cases	Actual Cases	Cost Per Capita	% Change in \$/Capita	Cost per Case
2017	\$ 603,040.00	1700-1900	2127	\$ 1.54	4.4%	\$ 283.52
2016	\$ 575,694.00	1700-1900	2021	\$ 1.47	3.1%	\$ 284.86
2015	\$ 550,903.00	1700-1900	2030	\$ 1.43	1.6%	\$ 271.38
2014	\$ 529,715.00	1500-1800	1866	\$ 1.41	N/A	\$ 283.88

Note 1: 2017 Actual Cases is estimated based on partial year of actuals

Note 2: Same estimated Population Used for 2016 & 2017 (.33% growth)- US Census Bureau

Case Type				
Year	Cases Waived	Body Examined	Medical Record Review	Remanded Cases+
2017*	1629	197	246	47
2016	1611	188	222	53
2015	1633	180	162	55
2014	1505	147	170	44

* Estimated based on monthly average.

+ Included in actual cases total

Staffing					
Year	<u>Pathologists</u>	<u>Administrative</u>	<u>Chief DI/Office Manager</u>	<u>FT Investigator</u>	<u>PT Investigators^</u>
2017	3	1	1	1	13
2016	3	1	1	1	9
2015	3	1	1	1	11
2014	3	1	1	1	7

^Independent Contractors

Objectives

The objectives of this review were to determine compliance with contract terms, and to determine if the county receiving services included in the contract.

Services listed in the contract include:

- Forensic Toxicology
- Special Professional Services:
 - Forensic Pathology
 - Forensic Radiology
 - Forensic Dentistry
 - Forensic Anthropology
 - Forensic Botany
 - Forensic Entomology
 - Forensic Clinical Chemistry
 - Forensic Microbiology
 - Histology Services
 - Investigational Staff to support 7 days a week, 24 hours a day
 - Transportation of bodies
- Communication of Completed Cases, when appropriate
- Provide a Chief and Deputy Chief Medical Examiner for the County

Note: The Medical Examiner provides Forensic Neuropathology.

Scope and Methodology

The County Auditor's Office conducted a review of the Medical Examiner's Office.

The scope of the review included contract years 2015, 2016 and January 1, – May 30, 2017. The following analysis was performed as part of our review:

- Obtained, reviewed, and documented any applicable policies, procedures, contracts, and regulations.
- Conducted inquiries with applicable parties.
- Reviewed case records and reports.

Review Observations

Observation 1: Audit Clause

Background:

St. Charles County contracts with third-parties for a variety of services and goods throughout normal operations that will result in signing of a contract. Per County operating practices, all such third-party contracts include a standard Audit Clause which allows, at County expense, an inspection of the contractor's accounting records, written policies and procedures, indirect cost records, etc. and any other data relating to the contract.

Issue:

Contracts between St. Louis University and the County have not included an audit clause. Note: There were no issues regarding access to records during this review.

Observation:

The County should ensure that an audit clause is added to all contracts to ensure proper records and access are available and retained for County review.

Status: The County Council approved the creation of a Regional Medical Examiner Program with ordinance #17-112. The program will be overseen by a Governing Board with an assigned designee of each participating county, but the St. Charles County Medical Examiner will oversee and administer the day-to-day operations, budget and plan for the Regional Medical Examiner's Office. Therefore, the new agreement resolved this observation.

Observation 2: Contract Payment Basis

Background:

The contract between St. Charles County and St. Louis University for Professional, Technical and Scientific Services is for an annualized amount not to exceed an agreed upon figure for that contract period. The County agrees to make periodic payments to St. Louis University for the services rendered when such statements or invoices for said services have been certified by the Medical Examiner or the Deputy Chief Medical Examiner acting in absence of the County Medical Examiner. The University bills and the County pays 1/12th of the annual amount each month. Although some of the services provided (administrative overhead, Chief Medical Examiner, death investigator program) are consistent from month to month, the contracted professional, technical and scientific services are based on volume of accepted jurisdiction of cases, which varies based on the number and type of cases and the associated required professional and testing services.

Observation:

The County should evaluate the different payment options for services to determine if paying an annual set amount is still the most cost-effective method. One method that could provide an opportunity to reduce overall

costs would be to pay for services rendered (plus a monthly administrative/overhead fee) rather than an annual amount or a combination of the two.

Note 1: Autopsies appear to be a cost driver for providing the service. Changing the contract terms could increase the County's cost for Medical Examiner services if the number of autopsies performed exceeded the budgeted amount during a contract period.

Note 2: The County is currently evaluating the 2018 budget request for this contract.

Status: The County Council approved the creation of a Regional Medical Examiner Program with ordinance #17-112. The program will be overseen by a Governing Board with an assigned designee of each participating county, but the St. Charles County Medical Examiner will oversee and administer the day-to-day operations, budget and plan for the Regional Medical Examiner's Office. Shared costs will be allocated based on caseload; otherwise, costs will be paid as they are incurred. Therefore, the new Regional program has resolved this observation.