

# **State of Alaska FY2009 Governor's Operating Budget**

## **Department of Health and Social Services State Medical Examiner Component Budget Summary**

**Component: State Medical Examiner**

**Contribution to Department's Mission**

The department's mission is to promote and protect the health and well-being of Alaskans. In support of this mission, the State Medical Examiner's Office (SMEO) provides a statewide system for the medical-legal investigation of unanticipated, sudden, and violent deaths in order to provide accurate, legally defensible determinations of the cause of death, information to ensure appropriate follow-up on all child deaths in the state, and surveillance to detect new or unexpected infectious diseases.

**Core Services**

- As required by law, investigate and certify all deaths that occur within the state of Alaska that are a result of violence, suspected violence, deaths due to accidental causes, deaths that occur during incarceration, deaths that are associated with conditions that pose a hazard to public safety or health, and all unattended or unexplained deaths. The central facility in Anchorage provides post mortem examinations appropriate for each case referred and includes access to state-of-the-art forensic medical services, including forensic pathology and radiology, odontology, anthropology, and the services of Public Health Laboratories and the Department of Public Safety Scientific Crime Detection Laboratory.
- For deaths that are investigated, establish identification of the deceased, if necessary; maintain records and evidence, and provide legally defensible determinations of the cause and manner of death. Present findings of the investigation to courts, law enforcement agencies, and other parties with legitimate interests in the death.
- Examine living persons to collect evidence as a result of previous injuries, and provide expert testimony in these cases.
- Participate in training personnel involved in death investigations, including forensic medico-legal investigators, local physicians, state and local police, village public safety officers and other authorities.

FY2009 Resources Allocated to Achieve Results		
<b>FY2009 Component Budget: \$2,039,000</b>	<b>Personnel:</b>	
	Full time	15
	Part time	0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

**Key Component Challenges**

- Increasing numbers of statewide autopsies, consults, teaching and required expert testimony for numerous SMEO cases affect the ability for the medical examiner to maintain and perform the expected increase in cases processed each year. With one medical examiner on staff, these tasks are daunting. SMEO regularly experiences difficulties in recruiting and retaining deputies. Salary levels and the high cost of living in Alaska are the main reason applicants decline the offer of employment, or don't remain long-term. Because SMEO is fully staffed with five investigators and autopsy assistants, when and if it can successfully recruit two deputy medical examiners, the office would be able to meet the expectations of increased autopsies performed and surveillance to detect new or unexpected infectious diseases.
- Replacing aging equipment in the autopsy suite and embalming/decomposition suite as funds are available, and remain OSHA compliant.
- With the addition of one or two deputy medical examiners, an additional Transcriptionist/Administrative Clerk III will be required to process the increase in caseload.
- In FY09, the office will continue on the prescribed track towards accreditation, following the guidelines of the

National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), as funding permits.

## Significant Changes in Results to be Delivered in FY2009

No significant changes.

## Major Component Accomplishments in 2007

- Total cases reported: 1,457
  - Cases autopsied: 288
  - Cases with consult: 790
  - Cases with inspection: 19
  - Cases with natural cause: 360
- Successfully completed the upgrade of aging X-ray equipment to a state-of-the-art digital system.
  - Continued on the accreditation track, as recommended by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). This included hiring one additional investigator and autopsy assistant to bring staff numbers more in tune with the population numbers for case processing.
  - The Child Fatality Review Committee successfully completed the review of 90 child death cases, of which eight were prosecuted as homicides. This is a collaborative effort between SMEO, District Attorney, State Troopers, APD, social workers from Child Protection Services (CPS), physicians who specialize in pediatrics, forensic nurses and an investigator from the SMEO. The Chief Medical Examiner is the chairman for this committee.
  - In collaboration with the anthropological staff at the University of Alaska and a forensic odontologist, SMEO identified 10 John or Jane Doe decedents brought in for processing. Worked with the Cold Case Unit, Alaska State Troopers (FBI project) and investigators, to solve cases and identify missing persons. SMEO continues to fund the Bone Committee Project to better catalog and document found remains. This has helped with an expeditious repatriation of remains, when necessary.
  - Collaborated with numerous state and federal agencies to gather statistics. This information was for local and national programs, which may provide information to consumers, work-related accidents, violent deaths, and motor vehicle accidents, to name a few.
  - Successfully archived hard copy case files from 1995 through a portion of 1997 to magnetic media storage.
  - Began collaborating with IT to construct a state-of-the-art database that will consist of state authorized software, a web-based platform that may have capabilities for future connection with numerous state agencies to obtain statistics for processing more timely death certificates. Reporting and managing case files will be more comprehensive due to additional information blocks available. This system also offers the possibility of a paperless system for everything pertaining to the individual case files.
  - The medical examiner provided expert testimony in court cases around Alaska.
  - Collaborated with the Section of Epidemiology in various epidemiological studies regarding deaths by alcohol, firearms and occupational deaths.
  - Successfully worked with Public Health Labs regarding transition of toxicological testing from MedTox laboratories to "on-site" processing for tests. The lab is processing alcohol, carbon monoxide, and occasionally some types of drug screens.
  - SMEO was again asked to present a lecture for law enforcement recruits, in both Sitka and Fairbanks.
  - SMEO held the third annual Medical Examiner Training Course in Anchorage in collaboration with the University of Anchorage.

## Statutory and Regulatory Authority

AS 12.65	Death Investigations and Medical Examinations
7 AAC 35	Embalming and Other Post-Mortem Services

**Contact Information**

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**State Medical Examiner  
Component Financial Summary**

*All dollars shown in thousands*

	FY2007 Actuals	FY2008 Management Plan	FY2009 Governor
<b>Non-Formula Program:</b>			
<b>Component Expenditures:</b>			
71000 Personal Services	1,202.8	1,516.8	1,573.8
72000 Travel	23.7	43.5	43.5
73000 Services	305.4	317.0	317.0
74000 Commodities	77.1	104.7	104.7
75000 Capital Outlay	63.3	0.0	0.0
77000 Grants, Benefits	0.0	0.0	0.0
78000 Miscellaneous	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Expenditure Totals</b>	<b>1,672.3</b>	<b>1,982.0</b>	<b>2,039.0</b>
<b>Funding Sources:</b>			
1004 General Fund Receipts	1,663.3	1,972.0	2,029.0
1156 Receipt Supported Services	9.0	10.0	10.0
<b>Funding Totals</b>	<b>1,672.3</b>	<b>1,982.0</b>	<b>2,039.0</b>

**Estimated Revenue Collections**

Description	Master Revenue Account	FY2007 Actuals	FY2008 Management Plan	FY2009 Governor
<b>Unrestricted Revenues</b>				
None.		0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Unrestricted Total</b>		<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>
<b>Restricted Revenues</b>				
Receipt Supported Services	51073	9.0	10.0	10.0
<b>Restricted Total</b>		<b>9.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>
<b>Total Estimated Revenues</b>		<b>9.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>

**Summary of Component Budget Changes  
From FY2008 Management Plan to FY2009 Governor**

*All dollars shown in thousands*

	<u>General Funds</u>	<u>Federal Funds</u>	<u>Other Funds</u>	<u>Total Funds</u>
<b>FY2008 Management Plan</b>	<b>1,972.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>1,982.0</b>
<b>Adjustments which will continue current level of service:</b>				
-FY 09 Health Insurance Increases for Exempt Employees	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.6
-FY 09 Bargaining Unit Contract Terms: General Government Unit	56.4	0.0	0.0	56.4
<b>FY2009 Governor</b>	<b>2,029.0</b>	<b>0.0</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>2,039.0</b>

**State Medical Examiner  
Personal Services Information**

<b>Authorized Positions</b>		<b>Personal Services Costs</b>		
	<b>FY2008 Management Plan</b>	<b>FY2009 Governor</b>		
Full-time	15	15	Annual Salaries	963,384
Part-time	0	0	COLA	52,840
Nonpermanent	0	0	Premium Pay	91,709
			Annual Benefits	526,897
			<i>Less 3.73% Vacancy Factor</i>	<i>(61,030)</i>
			Lump Sum Premium Pay	0
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>Total Personal Services</b>	<b>1,573,800</b>

**Position Classification Summary**

<b>Job Class Title</b>	<b>Anchorage</b>	<b>Fairbanks</b>	<b>Juneau</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>
Administrative Clerk II	1	0	0	0	1
Administrative Clerk III	1	0	0	0	1
Autopsy Assistant	3	0	0	0	3
Embalmer	2	0	0	0	2
Investigator I	4	0	0	0	4
Investigator II	1	0	0	0	1
Staff Physician	2	0	0	0	2
State Medical Examiner/Chief	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>