COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

DEPARTMENT OF CORONER

1104 N. MISSION RD., LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90033

"Enriching Lives"

Anthony T. Hernandez
Director

Lakshmanan Sathyavagiswaran, MD
Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner

August 14, 2006

TO: Mayor Michael D. Antonovich
Supervisor Gloria Molina
Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke
Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky
Supervisor Don Knabe

FROM: Anthony T. Hernandez, Director

Lakshmanan Sathyavagiswaran, M.D.
Chief Medical Examiner-Coroner

SUBJECT: CORONER CASELOAD UPDATE

This memo is to provide you with a status update on the previously reported caseload increases and to provide a plan to address this issue.

BACKGROUND

On August 3, 2006, we provided each of you copies of a memo sent to the CAO regarding unusually high caseloads, which were overwhelming our system. This raised serious concerns since the effects of this increase were protracted, lasting more than five to six weeks in duration. Typically, the Coroner sees "spikes" in caseload two to three times a year, which occur at the beginning of summer, the start of the holidays, and January as well. While these spikes do create delays, they generally last one to two weeks and are dealt with accordingly with existing staff and resources. The extended nature of the recent caseload increase in July, and early August hampered our ability to move cases through our system in a timely manner.

UPDATE/STATUS

As of today's reporting, the unrelenting caseload is finally showing signs of yielding to a more manageable level. The Coroner utilizes a computer generated management document called the "post list," which provides the status of all cases requiring handling and autopsy by the Coroner. At the height of the problem in July, the highest

number of cases requiring action in one day rose to 142. The average high was 123 cases, requiring action on a daily basis. Today's post list indicates 97 cases requiring action, which is a break in this dilemma. It is important to note that as of this writing, there are no reportable homicide cases that have been compromised and there are no evidence issues to report.

The Department of Coroner continues to provide a quality medicolegal death investigation and was recently re-accredited by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) until the year 2011.

SHORT-TERM ACTION PLAN

The department has taken a number of steps to deal with this unusual occurrence.

1. Modified Work Schedules

   The department has implemented modified work schedules wherever necessary to maximize and concentrate workflow needs in the most crucial areas. This includes field investigations, overtime for case report writing, transport, and other support areas.

2. Overtime

   The Coroner Investigators are already working overtime to address this issue. Physician and autopsy support staff will be working overtime to help reduce the additional autopsy caseload. Staff will come in on off days to prep/autopsy/exam/ release additional cases.

3. Hiring of Temporary Physicians

   The department will explore the feasibility of hiring available board certified forensic pathologists on an as-needed basis to alleviate the increased caseload. This could include forensic pathologists working in other counties as well as qualified private pathologists from the local area. At a later point, consideration for an agreement or contract for forensic pathologist services can be developed. Contracting will require the County to offer competitive remuneration in order to attract qualified individuals.

LONG-TERM ACTION PLAN

With the continued leveling of the caseload and implementation of above temporary measures, the caseload difficulties can be brought under control. However, if this new trend in increased caseload becomes the norm, the temporary measures stated above will have little impact on delays and the associated potential problems cited in our August 3, memo. As a long-term solution, we recommend serious consideration of a second-shift concept (or portion thereof), which not only addresses these unusual and prolonged caseload spikes, but also will improve the routine turnaround time for cases, which is currently three to four days, down to two days average. We have submitted a request for a three-year implementation plan for a second-shift concept to the CAO, which is attached.

Attachment

c: David Janssen, CAO
Robert Ragland, County Counsel

FISCAL YEAR 2006-07

POS.	TITLE	SALARY	EBs	TOTAL
1	SENIOR PHYSICIAN, MD	$166,440	$78,450	$244,890
2	PHYSICIAN, SPECIALIST PATHOLOGY	$297,168	$140,067	$437,235
2	SENIOR CRIMINALISTS	$167,852	$79,115	$246,967
1	SUPERVISING CRIMINALIST I	$88,606	$41,763	$130,369
1	SUPERVISING CRIMINALIST II	$93,550	$44,094	$137,644
4	EVIDENCE CUSTODIAN	$175,274	$82,614	$257,888
5	CORONER INVESTIGATOR	$316,860	$149,349	$466,209
1	SUPERVISING CORONER INVESTIGATOR I	$68,735	$32,398	$101,132
1	SUPERVISING CORONER INVESTIGATOR II	$75,119	$35,407	$110,525
1	SENIOR CLERK	$35,292	$16,635	$51,927
2	FORENSIC TECHNICIAN I	$82,479	$38,876	$121,355
1	FORENSIC TECHNICIAN II	$45,796	$21,586	$67,382
1	RADIOLOGIC TECHNOLOGIST	$49,887	$23,514	$73,401
1	SUPERVISING FORENSIC TECHNICIAN	$53,317	$25,130	$78,448
2	FORENSIC ATTENDANT	$73,748	$34,760	$108,508
1	SENIOR FORENSIC ATTENDANT	$40,251	$18,972	$59,223
1	SENIOR CLERK	$35,292	$16,635	$51,927
		$1,865,667	$879,363	$2,745,030

FISCAL YEAR 2007-08

POS.	TITLE	SALARY	EBs	TOTAL
1	SENIOR PHYSICIAN, MD	$170,604	$80,412	$251,016
2	PHYSICIAN, SPECIALIST PATHOLOGY	$304,597	$143,569	$448,166
4	SENIOR CRIMINALISTS	$344,096	$162,186	$506,282
1	SUPERVISING CRIMINALIST I	$90,821	$42,808	$133,629
1	SUPERVISING CRIMINALIST II	$95,889	$45,196	$141,085
4	EVIDENCE CUSTODIAN	$179,656	$84,679	$264,336
5	CORONER INVESTIGATOR	$324,782	$153,083	$477,864
1	SUPERVISING CORONER INVESTIGATOR I	$70,453	$33,207	$103,661
1	SENIOR CLERK	$36,174	$17,050	$53,225
2	FORENSIC TECHNICIAN I	$84,541	$39,848	$124,389
2	FORENSIC ATTENDANT	$75,591	$35,629	$111,221
		$1,777,206	$837,668	$2,614,874

FISCAL YEAR 2008-09

POS.	TITLE	SALARY	EBs	TOTAL
3	PHYSICIAN, SPECIALIST PATHOLOGY	$468,318	$220,737	$689,055
4	SENIOR CRIMINALISTS	$352,699	$166,241	$518,940
1	SUPERVISING CRIMINALIST I	$93,092	$43,878	$136,969
1	SUPERVISING CRIMINALIST II	$98,286	$46,326	$144,612
4	EVIDENCE CUSTODIAN	$184,148	$86,796	$270,944
5	CORONER INVESTIGATOR	$332,902	$156,910	$489,811

DEPARTMENT OF CORONER
CASELOAD UPDATE

SERVICES & SUPPLIES

Service and Supplies Cost/Three year

Phase I	06/07
590,000	Microscopes, laboratory supplies, autopsy supplies, health & safety wearing apparel, lab equipment, sedans, vans, histology services, field equipment, vehicle maintenance, computer equipment, training
Phase II	07/08
365,000	Microscopes, laboratory supplies, autopsy supplies, health & safety wearing apparel, lab equipment, drying cages, vans, sedans, field equipment, vehicle maintenance, computer equipment, training
Phase III	08/09
268,000	Microscopes, laboratory supplies, autopsy supplies, health & safety wearing apparel, field equipment, computer equipment, training.