

Hammond



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September 5, 2006

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

FROM: David E. Janssen  
Chief Administrative Officer

## REPORT ON DEPARTMENT OF THE CORONER CONTINGENCY PLAN FOR TEMPORARY CASELOAD INCREASES, EVALUATION OF A SECOND SHIFT, AND STATUS OF BODY OVERCAPACITY ISSUES (AGENDA OF SEPTEMBER 5, 2006, ITEM NO. 61)

On August 15, 2006, in response to the Department of Coroner's report regarding unusual caseload increases, your board directed the Coroner and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to:

- Develop a comprehensive contingency plan for dealing with future short-term increases in caseload, including hiring staff on an as-needed basis; and
- Conduct an evaluation of the Coroner's need for a second shift.

On June 26, 2006, the CAO and Coroner reported on management policies and overcapacity of crypt space. Your Board requested a 60-day status report on progress made in addressing these issues.

This document addresses both of the above matters as follows:

### Caseload Contingency Plan

The following contingency plan has been developed to address this issue:

1. Modified Work Schedules

The Coroner implemented modified work schedules in mid-July to begin addressing the increase in workload. It is estimated that 15-20 percent of staff (30-35 employees) were working modified shifts and mandated overtime. The positions involved included all levels of operations and support staff which included Forensic Pathologists, Coroner's Investigators, Forensic Attendants (transport/crypt management), Forensic Technicians (autopsy support), and various administrative and clerical support staff.

2. Overtime

Coroner Investigators are working overtime to address the additional caseload. Physician and autopsy support staff are also working overtime to help reduce the additional autopsy caseload. Staff is now being scheduled to come in on days off to prep/autopsy/exam/release additional cases.

3. Hiring of Temporary Physicians

The department is developing an agreement with County Counsel which will allow the Coroner to hire 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. However, recruitment under this premise poses challenges because of shortages in the field of forensic pathology, and competitive salary issues.

**CAO Evaluation and Recommendation - Second Shift**

The CAO has evaluated the Coroner's second-shift autopsy proposal, and believes that this concept would work when there is a continuous workload increase of significance, however the second shift should not be used to deal with seasonal fluctuations in workload. A cursory review of the fifty second shift positions indicate that there are too many high level or supervisory staff than are required and the total cost of the three year project is \$5.6 million.

The CAO does not support the Coroner's second shift proposal, however we will continue to review, analyze, and monitor the Coroner's workload increases and will provide recommendations as needed in the Coroner's 2007-08 Proposed Budget.

### **Crypt Overcapacity Status**

The Coroner has made significant strides in reducing the number of bodies awaiting cremation.

- For the period January to August 2006, 453 bodies have been released for cremation and the process continues to move efficiently. During the same period in 2005, there were only a total of 308 bodies released. This has minimized overcrowding and the associated negative conditions.
- Body count is presently at 380 down from a previous high of 417.
- At the meeting of August 15, 2006, your Board approved the Coroner Biological Annex refurbishment project. The Coroner and CAO met last week with HMC Architects who have been selected to provide design and consultant services. The next step is to approve in concept with HMC Architects and the CAO the Crypt building location and the actual reconfiguration of the Autopsy floor, which is underway. The next step is the design phase, followed by construction of the facility, which is expected to take approximately one year.
- At the budget deliberations meeting of June 26, 2006, your Board approved additional staffing to address the overcrowding issue. All positions allocated are currently in one of several phases of: hiring, background check, interview, and psychological evaluation. The Coroner is utilizing all available resources to facilitate the hiring of these critical positions and expects to complete the hiring process and to have the new positions on board by early December.

DEJ:DL  
RG:EM:yf

c: Department of Coroner  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors  
Auditor-Controller  
County Counsel