

MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING
Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista South
4955 Kyngs Heath Road
Kissimmee, Florida 34746
October 31, 2023 10:00 AM EDT

Commission Chairman Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., called the meeting of the Medical Examiners Commission to order at **10:01 AM**. She advised those in the audience that the meetings of the Medical Examiners Commission are open to the public and that members of the public will be allowed five minutes to speak. She then welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked Commission members, staff, and audience members to introduce themselves.

Commission members present:

Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., Districts 5 & 24 Medical Examiner
Nick Cox, J.D., Statewide Prosecutor, Office of the Attorney General
Robin Giddens Sheppard, L.F.D., Funeral Director
Kenneth T. Jones, State Registrar, Department of Health
Hon. Charlie Cofer, J.D., Public Defender, 4th Judicial Circuit
Joshua Stephany, M.D., Districts 9 & 25 Medical Examiner
Hon. Amira Fox, J.D., State Attorney, 20th Judicial Circuit
Hon. Robert "Bob" Johnson, Santa Rosa County Sheriff

Commission staff present:

Brett Kirkland, Ph.D.	Megan Neel
Jim Martin, J.D.	Ashley Williams

District Medical Examiners present:

Jon R. Thogmartin, M.D. (Districts 2 & 6)	Sajid S. Qaiser, M.D. (District 18)
Russell S. Vega, M.D. (Districts 12 & 22)	
James Fulcher, M.D. (District 7)	

Other District personnel present:

Sheri Blanton (District 9/25)	Dan Schebler (District 1)
Karla Orozco (District 7)	Ricardo Camacho (District 8)
Lindsey Bayer (District 5/24)	
Madison Worley (District 7)	

Guests present:

Brittany Hill (Lifeline)	Sherry Groover (Citizen)
Chad Brown (FDLE)	

A MOTION WAS MADE, SECONDED, AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO APPROVE THE AGENDA.

A MOTION WAS MADE, SECONDED, AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JULY 19, 2023 MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING.

ISSUE NUMBER 1: INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

- Status Report: MEC Appointments and Reappointments: Barbara C. Wolf, M.D. and Amira Fox, J.D. were nominated and unanimously recommended for reappointment for the Medical Examiners Commission for cycle ending in June 2026. (Barbara C. Wolf, M.D. and Amira Fox, J.D. abstained from voting.)

- **Status Report: DME Appointment Ratifications:** Bureau Chief Brett Kirkland, Ph.D., informed the Commission that a letter was sent to the Governor's Appointment Office confirming the ratifications of all appointments and reappointments of District Medical Examiners by the Commission. Mr. Kirkland also confirmed that the letter recommending gubernatorial appointment of Russell Vega, M.D., as the District 22 Medical Examiner was sent to the Governor's Appointment Office. We are still currently awaiting appointments from the Governor's Appointment Office.
- **District 2 Medical Examiner Vacancy:** Joshua Stephany, M.D., informed the Commission that the District 2 search committee will be interviewing 2 candidates on November 17, 2023.
- **2023 Interim Drug Report:** Mrs. Megan Neel informed the Commission that drug data is due to her by November 30, 2023 and if this was going to be a problem to let her know.
- **2022 Annual Drug Report:** Mrs. Neel informed the Commission that she was still waiting on a couple of districts to return data but otherwise hoping to have it published by the end of November.
- **2022 Annual Workload Report:** Mrs. Megan Neel advised that the report was posted and sent out on October 18, 2023.
- **2022 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update:** Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that we are still missing MOU's from District 16/18 so please get those in. Also, please continue to send in reimbursement requests.
- **2023 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update:** Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that funds still have not been released so please do not purchase anything until you hear from her or the grants manager.

ISSUE NUMBER 4: UNIDENTIFIED DECEASED INITIATIVE

Mrs. Williams reported the following success stories from District 1 and 7.

District 1

- The District 1 Medical Examiner's Office with the aid of Othram, Inc., has identified human remains found by a road crew in Okaloosa County on September 14, 1994, as Suzanne L. Kjellenberg. On September 15, 1994, the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office received the skeletonized remains of a female found near I-10. During the initial investigation, the remains were sent to the C.A. Pound Human Identification Laboratory in Gainesville by Dr. Kielman. An osteological examination showed the remains to be that of a white female aged approximately 35 to 55 years. Samples were sent for entomological examination for estimation of time since death. A clay facial reconstruction did not generate any leads. Serial killer Keith Jespersion later admitted to killing a woman and disposing of her remains in the area, stating she called herself Suzanne. In 2007, a forensic artist completed a new facial reconstruction in hopes of identifying the victim. In 2008, the remains were sent for additional anthropological examination at the University of West Florida. Specimens were sent to the FBI Laboratory for DNA analysis and entry into the National Missing Person DNA Database. Mitochondrial DNA was also analyzed and entered into CODIS. In 2018, specimens were sent for isotope analysis at the University of Florida. In late 2022, the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office began working with Othram, a company that uses genetic genealogy to aid in identification. Othram, Inc., based in The Woodlands, Texas, is a leader in using Forensic-Grade Genome Sequencing to develop comprehensive genealogical profiles. Earlier this year, the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office sent samples to Othram, Inc. and, with funding through the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs), a genealogical profile produced

leads that led to Kjellenberg's identification.

- In December of 2019 skeletal remains were discovered in Pensacola, Florida. The remains were discovered by an individual living in a storage facility adjacent to the drainage culvert where the decedent was located. Law enforcement had advised that there was a known transient camp nearby. In January 2019 the remains were transferred for analysis to Dr. Winburn, Forensic Anthropologist with the University of West Florida and the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office D1MEO released a left rib to the Escambia County Sheriff's Office (ECSO) to submit to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) for DNA analysis. The District One Medical Examiner's Office contacted ECSO in October 2020, discovering that the rib bone had not yet been submitted to FDLE; after formal request from the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office, the rib bone was immediately sent by ECSO to FDLE. Unfortunately, FDLE was not conducting testing of mitochondrial DNA at this time and the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office was referred to the University of North Texas Center for Human Identification. In April 2021, the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office was advised that UNT was no longer accepting new cases. In March 2023, a NamUs database search of local missing persons from the area was conducted and compared to all District 1 Medical Examiner's Office unidentified cases. A potential match was identified. The "believed to be" (antemortem) radiographs (x-rays) and the postmortem radiographs of the unidentified skeletal remains were compared and reviewed by Dr. Oleske, Interim District Medical Examiner. Following additional consultation with Dr. Winburn, it was determined this case was a good candidate for identification using the Rapid DNA ANDE identification system recently brought into service by the District 1 Medical Examiner's Office. Familial DNA comparison was made using a buccal swab submitted by the missing person's family and the unidentified skeletal remains. The results confirmed the familial relationship with 99.99% certainty, and skeletal features support that the identification of the remains as that of Amber Guzman. The District 1 Medical Examiner's Office, after so many fruitless efforts, was able to provide long-awaited closure to the decedent's family.

District 7

- On April 23, 1990, the District 7 medical examiner responded to a wooded area east of Clyde Morris Blvd., in Ormond Beach, Florida, where a decedent's lower appendicular skeleton was located by a passerby. The medical examiner and the Volusia Sheriff's Office (VSO) conducted a search of the area. They were able to locate the upper portion of the decedent's skeleton 20 feet south of the first set of remains, and the skull and mandible were located 30 feet south of the first set of remains. The decedent was found with rope wrapped around the wrists and cervical vertebrae. The death was ruled a homicide. On April 26, 1990, a Forensic Odontology examination was completed and determined that the decedent was likely a female between 20-30 years old. In April of 1990, the remains were sent out for anthropologic examination, and the report was received on June 17th of, 1990. The report concluded the decedent was a female aged 25 to 40 years old, and she was approximately 64 inches tall. On November 26, 2008, samples were sent to the New Jersey State Police Office of Forensic Science and the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Forensic lab, where they were able to extract an mtDNA profile and develop a nuclear DNA profile, respectively. On July 22, 2016, the remains were sent to the University of South Florida for Chemical and Elemental Isotopic Analysis. In June of 2023, the report was received indicating that the decedent was born in the United States and likely spent the first part of her life in the southeastern United States. In June of 2023, a petrous bone was sent to Othram Inc. for Forensic Genealogy testing. The lab was able to develop a genealogic profile and identify possible relatives of the decedent. The Volusia Sheriff's Office approached the potential relatives and were able to gather DNA samples for comparison. Those comparisons resulted in the positive identification of the decedent as Roberta Weber on September 28, 2023.

ISSUE NUMBER 5: EMERGING DRUGS

- Bureau Chief Brett Kirkland, Ph.D. provided the Commission with an update on current drug trends on behalf of Bruce Goldberger, Ph.D. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl continues to be frequently identified in decedents. Polysubstance use with fentanyl is common and includes cocaine and/or methamphetamine along with other substances associated with ingestion such as xylazine. Alpha-PiHP, a cathinone, has become prevalent in Broward County. There was also an increasing prevalence of N,N-Dimethylpentylone in decedents as well as reports of the designer benzodiazepine, flualprazolam, in decedents in the Gainesville area. Furthermore, Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that the toxicology laboratory directors meeting has expanded to include directors from DUI labs, the Poison Control Center of Jacksonville, and representatives from the Department of Health. Directors and representatives last met on Monday, September 18, 2023, and continue to provide valuable information on emerging drug trends.

ISSUE NUMBER 6: OTHER BUSINESS

- Dr. Wolf read into record a signed resolution for former Deputy Director Victoria Koenig.

WHEREAS, the Medical Examiners Commission was created in 1970 by the passage of Chapter 406, Part I, Florida Statutes, also known as the Medical Examiners Act; and,

WHEREAS, this Commission plays a vital role in support of Florida's criminal justice system, to the families of the deceased in determining the cause and manner of death of their loved ones whose deaths come under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner, and by contributing to the protection of the public health of the citizens of Florida; and,

WHEREAS, the staff which serves the Medical Examiners Commission is housed within and supported by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement; and,

WHEREAS, Mrs. Victoria Koenig has served the citizens of Florida since 1992, and joined the staff of the Medical Examiners Commission in 2001; and,

WHEREAS, Deputy Director Koenig's dedication to the Medical Examiners Commission has contributed greatly to the policies and rules that govern the medical examiners of this State, and

WHEREAS, Deputy Director Koenig's insightful and thorough oversight of investigations has served to maintain the quality and integrity of the Florida medical examiner system and,

WHEREAS, Deputy Director Koenig has not only earned the reputation as being an invaluable resource for the Medical Examiners Commission, but she has, above all, earned the reputation as being considerate, intelligent, and meticulous,

NOW THEREFORE, let it be resolved that this Commission on behalf of Florida's medical examiners, the medical-legal community, and all of the citizens of Florida whom she has served so well, does hereby recognize and commend Deputy Director, Mrs. Victoria Koenig for the dedication and valuable service she has offered to the Florida medical examiners system and hopes that she maintains her success in future endeavors.

PASSED AND RECORDED, in the official minutes of the Medical Examiners Commission meeting on this Tuesday, the 31st day of October, 2023, in Kissimmee, Osceola County, Florida.

- Chairman Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., provided the Commission an update on the Conrad 30 program. A letter was sent to the State Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo, M.D., Ph.D. requesting that forensic

pathologists be given top priority when determining sponsorship priorities for applications to the Conrad 30 program. A response was received from the Primary Care Office Director Jeffrey C. Johnson of the Department of Health, advising that the Department of Health will support Medical Examiners in districts that apply that are wanting to apply for the Conrad 30 program. Director Johnson also provided additional information in regards to another J-1 Visa program, the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission and stated that the program could provide the most effective and immediate opportunity to address the vacancies across the medical examiner district network.

- 2024 FAME Educational Conference: Bureau Chief Brett Kirkland, Ph.D. announced that FAME will be celebrating its 50th year at the 2024 FAME Educational Conference. Mr. Kirkland reported that it is scheduled to be held July 17-19, 2024 at the Westin Sarasota in Sarasota, Florida. The event will be hosted by the District 22 Medical Examiner Dr. Russell Vega.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 10:36 A.M.