

MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING

Sawgrass Marriott Golf Resort & Spa
1000 TPC Blvd.
Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082
August 13, 2024, 10:00 AM EDT

Commission Chairman Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., called the meeting of the Medical Examiners Commission (MEC) to order at **10:04 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 (Virtual)
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. Michael A. Barnett, Palm Beach County Commissioner (Virtual)

Commission staff present:

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

District Medical Examiners present:

Patricia A. Aronica, M.D. (District 19)

Other District personnel present:

Lindsey Bayer (Districts 5 & 24)	Dan Schebler (District 1)
Peter Gillespie, M.D. (District 4)	Jeff Brokaw (District 4)

Guests present:

Tinene Alter (NMS Labs)	Shane Lockwood (FDOH)
Heather Markuson (LifeQuest Organ Recovery)	Mary Ann Prim (FDOH)
Yasmin Fucci (FDOH)	Jason Byrd (FEMORS)
Lana Sample (FDOH)	Lerah Sutton (FEMORS)

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

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ISSUE NUMBER 1: INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

- Status Report: MEC Reappointments: Bureau Chief Brett Kirkland, Ph.D., advised that at the last Medical Examiners Commission meeting in May 2024, the Commission voted to recommend Robin Giddens Sheppard, L.F.D., and Joshua Stephany, M.D. for reappointment. Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that all documentation has been sent to the Governor's Office and the Governor's

Appointment Office for reappointment. We are currently still awaiting appointments/reappointments from the Governor's Appointment Office.

- Status Report: DME Appointment and Reappointments: Dr. Kirkland advised that he emailed the Governor's Appointment Office around July 29, 2024, requesting a status update on all appointments and reappointments for District Medical Examiners. Unfortunately, there is still no update and we are still awaiting appointments and reappointments from the Governor's Appointment Office.
- District 8 Medical Examiner Vacancy Update: Dr. Joshua Stephany informed the Commission that there have not been any changes and the Search Committee is still in the fact-finding phase. Dr. Stephany advised that Dr. Kirkland attended the meeting and could address further. Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that the Search Committee met on June 24, 2024, and will reconvene later this year.
- 2023 Interim Drug Report: Mrs. Megan Neel informed the Commission that the 2023 Interim Drug Report was published to the MEC website on July 9, 2024. Mrs. Neel advised that if you would like a copy to please send her an email.
- 2023 Annual Drug Report: Mrs. Megan Neel informed the Commission that all data has been received and sent to Quality Assurance Committee for review.
- 2023 Annual Workload Report: Mrs. Megan Neel advised that she has received the data. It is in the review process. Once reviewed, all data will be compiled and published.
- 2021 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that September 30, 2024, is the last day to submit all reimbursements for the 2021 Coverdell Grant. Mrs. Williams advised that reimbursement requests were still missing for Districts 13 and 17.
- 2022 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that FDLE Grants is working on getting an extension for the 2022 Coverdell Grant, however it has not been granted yet. Mrs. Williams advised that Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were not received from Districts 15, 16, and 18; along with reimbursement requests from Districts 2, 6, 10, 12, 14, and 19. Mrs. Williams advised the districts to submit their MOUs and reimbursement requests before September 30, 2024.
- 2023 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that reimbursement requests are starting to be processed for the 2023 Coverdell and advised the districts to continue to spend their allotment and submit reimbursement requests. Mrs. Williams also requested that when submitting reimbursement requests that the districts email both her and Candace Pridgeon.

ISSUE NUMBER 2: UNIDENTIFIED DECEASED INITIATIVE

Mrs. Williams reported the following success story from District 13.

On July 14, 2022, at approximately 1125 hours, a decomposed, partially skeletonized body was located in a wooded area of Tampa, FL with drug paraphernalia found on scene. The cause and manner of death were determined to be: Accident, Combined Toxic Effects of Methamphetamine and Fentanyl. No identification could be established at that time. Through collaborative efforts between Hillsborough County Medical Examiner, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, and Pinellas

County Forensic Laboratory, they were able to finally positively ID this individual as Renaldo Ortiz after DNA report came back and provided a CODIS offender hit notification.

ISSUE NUMBER 3: FEMORS Update

Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System Update: Dr. Jason Byrd, Commander for the Florida Emergency Mortuary Operations Response System (FEMORS) presented a proposal to the Commission of an annual review of the Florida Mass Fatality Plan (FLMFP) by FEMORS. Dr. Byrd advised that the review of the would result in recommendations for changes to the FLMFP. The recommended changes will be presented to the Commission at the first meeting of each year. It will then be up to the Commission to accept or reject the recommendations. Mr. Ken Jones inquired if the FLMFP is consistent now or if the changes that Dr. Byrd discussed are for future recommendations that will be addressed at the beginning of the year. Dr. Byrd advised that as of right now, the FLMFP has not changed but the proposal for changes would be made at the beginning of the year and the changes would be made on a five-year life cycle. Dr. Byrd also informed the Commission that FEMORS uses the Victim Information Program, which is the same program that is used by DMORT (Disaster Mortuary Operations Response Team). Dr. Byrd stated that over the last couple of years, it has become increasingly aware that there is a problem when gathering initial missing persons information. Therefore, they have turned to a program that is in widespread use throughout Florida and the United States called ReadyOp. ReadyOp is an information gathering program that is optimized for cell phones and tablets. The program is now functional and has replaced the call center, allowing easier communications between FEMORS and medical examiners for updates regarding missing persons. Dr. Byrd then introduced Dr. Lerah Sutton, FEMORS Deputy Commander Program Co-Director. Dr. Sutton shared information regarding the administrative and staffing updates for FEMORS, advising that FEMORS is entering into a new contract cycle with the University of Florida being the administrator of the grant. Dr. Jason Byrd is appointed as the Program Instructor for administration within the university and the Commander during deployments scenarios. Dr. Sutton advised that she has been appointed at the Co-Program Instructor within the university system and will act as the Deputy Commander during deployment scenarios. Also, FEMORS is hiring a new Administrative Officer, which is a full-time position shared between FEMORS projects and University of Florida. They will also be bringing on a new Logistics Chief who will share a one year overlap period with the current Logistics Chief.

ISSUE NUMBER 4: EMERGING DRUGS

Dr. Kirkland provided the Commission with an update on new drug trends on behalf of Bruce Goldberger, Ph.D. There were several new and significant findings of drugs in decedents during the last quarter. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is the most frequently identified drug, most often in combination with other substances including 4-ANPP, cocaine, para-fluorofentanyl, methamphetamine, and xylazine. N,N-Dimethylpentylone continues to be the most prevalent cathinone identified in decedents. Newly identified substances (cathinones) include N-cyclohexylbutylone, N-cyclohexylmethylone, and N-isopropylbutylone; and there is a notable increase in the prevalence of carfentanil, ketamine, and methylenedioxymethamphetamine (MDMA) in decedents. Finally, a substance that has gained popularity and is in the news recently, "Tusi", also known as "pink cocaine", has been identified in south Florida. "Tusi" is typically ketamine mixed with other substances including caffeine, cocaine, methamphetamine, MDMA and/or new psychoactive substances.

ISSUE NUMBER 5: Other Business

- Dr. Barbara Wolf informed the Commission that Dr. Thomas Coyne was no longer able to serve as the medical examiner on the State Child Abuse Death Review Committee, therefore the committee asked the Commission to appointment a medical examiner to fill the vacancy. Dr. Wolf advised that Dr. Russell Vega has volunteered and has been appointed. The appointment will be effective through 2025.
- Mr. Ken Jones provided the Commission with an update on the Department of Health's Electronic Death Registration System (EDRS), advising that FDOH is in the process of working through growing pains, but the EDRS system is up one hundred percent. Mr. Jones advised if there is a medical examiner's office with staff that are not fully up online to contact him, and he will assist with getting them access and set up.
- Mary Ann Prim with the Florida Department of Health provided the Commission with an update for the Florida Violent Death Reporting System data collection for 2022. Mrs. Prim advised with the help of district medical examiners, FDOH was able to meet the performance benchmark and for the first time, Florida was included in the national data set. Mrs. Prim also informed the Commission that the 2023 data collection is underway and that FDOH is continuing to target at least sixty percent of the burden of cases in Florida. There is potential for expansion of the target and as soon as FDOH has permission, they will try to expand to seventy percent.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 10:31 A.M.