

MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING
Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista South
4955 Kyngs Heath Rd
Kissimmee, FL 34746
May 19, 2023, 10:00 AM EDT

Commission Chairman Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., called the meeting of the Medical Examiners Commission to order at **10:00 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. Michael A. Barnett, Palm Beach County Commissioner
Hon. Robert "Bob" Johnson, Santa Rosa County Sheriff

Commission staff present:

Brett Kirkland, Ph.D.	Megan Neel
James D. Martin, J.D.	Ashley Williams
Felipe Williams	Vickie Koenig

District Medical Examiners present:

Deanna Oleske, M.D. (District 1)	Catherine R. Miller, M.D. (District 15)
Patricia A. Aronica, M.D. (District 19)	Jon R. Thogmartin, M.D. (District 6)
Sajid S. Qaiser, M.D. (District 18)	

Other District personnel present:

Dan Schebler (District 1)	Trevor Shaffer (District 18)
Cassie Boggs, M.D. (District 7)	Ralph Saccone (District 15)
Sheri Blanton (District 9/25)	Paul Petrino (District 15)
Lindsey Bayer (District 5/24)	

Guests present:

Sherry Groover
Bethany Hill (LifeLink)

A MOTION WAS MADE, SECONDED, AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO APPROVE THE AMENDED AGENDA, REMOVING DISTRICT 22 FROM THE REAPPOINTMENT NOMINATIONS DUE TO POSITION VACANCY AND ADDING DISTRICT 24 TO THE REAPPOINTMENT NOMINATIONS.

A MOTION WAS MADE, SECONDED, AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 17, 2023 MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING.

ISSUE NUMBER 1: INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

- Status Report: DME Appointment: Bureau Chief Brett Kirkland, Ph.D., announced to the Commission that the Governor's Office has officially appointed Dr. Thomas Coyne as the District Medical Examiner for District 10 and Dr. Wendolyn Sneed as the District Medical Examiner for District 23. Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that all other appointment and reappointments are currently still pending.
- Status Report: DME Appointment Ratifications: Dr. Kirkland advised that the Governor's Reappointment Office has requested that all outstanding initial appointments for Districts 1, 4, 16, 19 and 24 be ratified by the Commission for any appointment recommendations made by the Commission prior to 2022. Mr. Cofer advised for the record, Dr. Wolf recused herself from the vote for the appointment ratification for District 24.

WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION, MRS. SHEPPARD MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE RATIFICATIONS OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER APPOINTMENT RECOMMENATIONDS IN DISTRICTS 1, 4, 16, 19, AND 24 AND MR. COX SECONDED. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY THAT THE APPOINTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS OF DISTRICT 1, 4, 16, 19, AND 24 MEDICAL EXAMINERS BE FORWARDED TO THE GOVERNOR'S APPOINTMENTS OFFICE.

- Status Report: DME Reappointment Ratifications: Additionally, Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that the Governor's Office also requested that the reappointments for district medical examiners outstanding prior to the 2023 cycle be ratified by the Commission. Those districts were districts 5, 6, 10, 12 and 14. Mr. Cofer advised for the record that Dr. Wolf recused herself from the vote for reappointment ratification for District 5.

WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION, MR.COX MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE RATIFICATIONS OF THE INCUMBENT MEDICAL EXAMINERS IN DISTRICTS 5, 6, 10, 12, AND 14 AND MRS. FOX SECONDED. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY THAT THE REAPPOINTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS OF DISTRICT 5, 6, 10, 12, AND 14 MEDICAL EXAMINERS BE FORWARDED TO THE GOVERNOR'S APPOINTMENTS OFFICE.

- District 2 Medical Examiner Vacancy: Dr. Joshua Stephany informed the Commission that Dr. Thogmartin's office is assisting District 2 during the search committee and there are 3 candidates who have applied. Dr. Stephany advised that the search committee will be conducting interviews on June 22, 2023.
- New District 22 Medical Examiner: Honorable Amira Fox informed the Commission that the District 22 search committee has completed the search and will recommending Dr. Russell Vega as the District Medical Examiner.
- 2022 Interim Drug Report: Mrs. Megan Neel informed the Commission that the 2022 Interim Drug Report is in the final review stage and once approved it will be posted to the website.
- 2022 Annual Workload Report: Mrs. Megan Neel informed the Commission that data is due to her by May 31, 2023.
- 2022 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that Bureau of Justice Assistance has released the funding for the 2022 Coverdell Grant and the awarded packages were sent out electronically of April 22, 2023. Mrs. Williams advised that districts cannot be reimbursed until the completed MOUs have been signed and returned to the grant manager.

- 2023 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that eleven districts have sent proposals for the 2023 Coverdell Grant. The M. E. allotment total is \$51,440. Mrs. Williams advised that the funds are not expected to be released until 2024.
- 2023 Legislative Session Update: FDLE General Counsel James Martin, J.D., informed the Commission of bills of interest to the Commission and the medical examiner community. Mr. Martin stated that Senate Bill 2500 Appropriations passed approving, \$1.5 Million for District 1 facility planning, design and construction, \$1.0 Million for District 19 facility planning and design, and \$1.0 Million for District 21 facility. Mr. Martin stated that Senate Bill 164 and House Bill 165, dealing with controlled substance testing, revises the definition of the term “drug paraphernalia” in s. 893.145, F.S., to exclude certain drug testing products for fentanyl. Mr. Martin informed the Commission of an addition bill, Senate Bill 404, Public Records, dealing with autopsy reports of minor victims of domestic violence and revisions to create an exemption for autopsy photographs and videos of minors whose deaths were related to acts of domestic violence. Mr. Martin also informed the Commission of Senate Bill 736, stating that this bill would add nitazene derivatives to the list of Scheduled I controlled substances. Mr. Martin reported that House Bill 365 and Senate Bill 280 would provide criminal penalties for adults who sell, distribute, or dispense specified substances in which an injury or overdose of the users occurs.

ISSUE NUMBER 2: REAPPOINTMENT NOMINATIONS FOR DISTRICTS 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, AND 24 AND ASSESSMENTS FOR DISTRICTS 15 AND 17

The Commission reviewed the constituent surveys for the reappointments of district medical examiners in District 16 (Monroe County), District 18 (Brevard County), District 19 (Indian River, Martin, Okeechobee, and St. Lucie counties), District 20 (Collier County), District 21 (Glades, Hendry, and Lee counties), District 22 (Charlotte County), District 23 (Flagler, Putnam, and St. Johns counties) and District 24 (Seminole County).

The Commission also reviewed the survey assessments for District 15 (Palm Beach County) and District 17 (Broward County). District 15 and District 17 are home rule districts.

With constituents overwhelmingly responding with approval for the district medical examiners in districts 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, and 24, the Commission held a vote for the districts up for reappointment. Dr. Wolf recused herself from the vote for the District 24 medical examiner. No other names were submitted for consideration in these districts.

MRS. SHEPPARD MADE A MOTION TO REMOVE DISTRICT 21 FROM THE LUMP VOTE FOR REAPPOINTMENT FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION AND MR. JONES SECONDED. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY THAT DISTRICT 21 BE REMOVED FROM THE LUMP VOTE FOR REAPPOINTMENT FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION.

WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION, MRS. SHEPPARD MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE REAPPOINTMENTS OF THE INCUMBENT MEDICAL EXAMINERS IN DISTRICTS 18, 19, 20, 23, AND 24 AND MR. JONES SECONDED. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY THAT THE REAPPOINTMENT RECOMMENDATIONS OF DISTRICT 18, 19, 20, 23, AND 24 MEDICAL EXAMINERS BE FORWARDED TO THE GOVERNOR’S APPOINTMENTS OFFICE.

Mrs. Sheppard expressed concern about District 21 (Glades, Hendry, and Lee counties) and the survey responses from funeral home directors regarding staffing and scheduled pick-ups. Mr. Kirkland advised that District 21 has provided the Commission with a written response to the surveys. Mrs.

Sheppard asked that a recommendation be made that Dr. Hamilton meet with the funeral home directors in her area to discuss the issues. Dr. Wolf informed the Commission that she would speak with Dr. Hamilton and make the recommendation.

WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION, MRS. SHEPPARD MADE A MOTION TO APPROVE THE REAPPOINTMENTS OF THE INCUMBENT MEDICAL EXAMINER IN DISTRICT 21 AND MR. COX SECONDED. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY THAT THE REAPPOINTMENT RECOMMENDATION OF DISTRICT 21 MEDICAL EXAMINER BE FORWARDED TO THE GOVERNOR'S APPOINTMENTS OFFICE.

ISSUE NUMBER 3: CONRAD 30 PROGRAM

Dan Schebler, Director of Operations in District 1, gave a presentation on the Conrad 30 Program. Mr. Schebler outlined the program and the opportunities that it provides to foreign national physicians to apply for a waiver that would waive the requirement in which they are required to go to their home country for two years before returning back to the United States on an employment-based visa. The program grants waivers to 30 physicians per a state and is not limited to pathologists. The application process is limited to a 10-day period in October. Mr. Schebler recommended that districts that are interested in the program hire an expert or speak with other districts who have applied for assistance. Mr. Jones stated he can provide the contact information to anyone who is interested. Dr. Kirkland suggested that the Commission draft a letter to the Office of the Surgeon General highlighting the critical shortage of pathologists in the state and that the Commission recommends pathologists be given top priority when considering applicants to the Conrad 30 program.

MR. COFER MADE A MOTION TO SEND A LETTER TO THE OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL SEEKING PREFERENCE FOR PATHOLOGISTS IN THE CONRAD 30 PROGRAM AND MR. COX SECONDED. THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO APPROVE THE LETTER TO THE OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL.

ISSUE NUMBER 4: EMERGING DRUGS

Bureau Chief Brett Kirkland, Ph.D., provided the Commission with an update on new drug trends on behalf of Bruce Goldberger, Ph.D. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is frequently identified in decedents. Other substances associated with the ingestion of fentanyl include 4-ANPP, fluorofentanyl, and xylazine. The prevalence of xylazine in decedents is decreasing; and the toxicology laboratories are monitoring for other non-opioid veterinary tranquilizers including medetomidine. Polysubstance use with fentanyl is common and includes cocaine and/or methamphetamine. N,N-Dimethylpentylone is the most prevalent cathinone in decedents; but others have been identified including N-cyclohexyl butylone, N-cyclohexyl methylone, and N-propyl butylone. Designer benzodiazepines in decedents include bromazolam, clonazolam, and flualprazolam. Dr. Kirkland also informed the Commission that the toxicology laboratory directors met on Friday, May 12, 2023 and continues to provide valuable information on emerging drug trends.

ISSUE NUMBER 10: 2023 FAME EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE

Dr. Kirkland reported that the 2023 FAME Educational Conference is scheduled to be held July 19-21, 2023, at the Omni Orlando Resort in Champions Gate, Florida. The event will be jointly sponsored by the District 8 Medical Examiner's Office and the University of Florida.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 10:38 A.M.