

**MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING**  
Embassy Suites by Hilton Orlando Lake Buena Vista South  
4955 Kyngs Heath Road  
Kissimmee, Florida 34746  
October 29, 2024 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 (Virtual)  
Robin Giddens Sheppard, L.F.D., Funeral Director  
Kenneth T. Jones, State Registrar, Department of Health (Virtual)  
Hon. Charlie Cofer, J.D., Public Defender, 4<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit (Virtual)  
Joshua Stephany, M.D., Districts 9 & 25 Medical Examiner  
Hon. Amira Fox, J.D., State Attorney, 20<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit

**Commission staff present:**

Brett Kirkland, Ph.D.	Megan Neel
Jeff Dambly, J.D.	Ashley Williams

**District Medical Examiners present:**

Deanna Oleske, M.D. (District 1)	Sajid S. Qaiser, M.D. (District 18)
Catherine Miller, M.D. (District 15)	
Russell S. Vega, M.D. (Districts 12 & 22)	

**Other District personnel present:**

Sheri Blanton (District 9/25)	Rob Padrino (District 9/25)
Lindsey Bayer (District 5/24)	Kelly Boulos (District 23)
Dan Schebler (District 1)	Ralph Saccone (District 15)
Leah Henry (District 23)	Paul Petrino (District 15)

**Guests present:**

Tinene Alter (NMS Labs)	Sherry Groover (Citizen)
Shane Lockwood (Department of Health)	Susan Rabel (LifeLink of Florida)
Brittany Hill (LifeLink of Florida)	Darren Lahrman (LifeLink of Florida)

**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 MAY14, 2024 MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING.**

**ISSUE NUMBER 1: INTRODUCTION OF NEW LEGAL COUNSEL JEFF DAMBLY**

- Introduction: Bureau Chief Brett Kirkland, Ph.D., introduced the Commission and audience members to new Legal Counsel Jeff Dambly. Mr. Dambly is replacing former Commission Legal Counsel Jim Martin.

## **ISSUE NUMBER 2: INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

- Status Report: MEC Appointments and Reappointments: Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that a letter was sent to the Governor's Appointments Office regarding all appointments and reappointments of District Medical Examiners by the Commission. Dr. Kirkland advised that we are still awaiting appointments/reappointments from the Governor's Appointments Office.
- Status Report: DME Appointment and Reappointments: Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that all district medical examiners are currently pending either appointment or reappointment. Dr. Kirkland advised that he reached out to the appointment's office for a status, but we are still waiting on appointments from the Governor.
- District 8 Medical Examiner Vacancy: Joshua Stephany, M.D., informed the Commission that the District 8 District Medical Examiner's position is still vacant and has no news to report. Dr. Jon Thogmartin will continue to provide coverage.
- 2024 Interim Drug Report: Mrs. Megan Neel informed the Commission that drug data is due to her by November 30, 2024 and if this was going to be a problem to let her know. Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that the laboratories are improving on turn-around times therefore the deadline for the 2025 Interim Drug Report will now be March 31, 2025. Mrs. Neel informed the medical examiners that they can submit their cases with pending information if needed and then a week before the deadline she will reach out to get finalized information on the pending cases.
- 2023 Annual Drug Report: Mrs. Neel informed the Commission that she has received all the data and is in the process of proofing it. Mrs. Neel advised she is looking to have it published by the end of November. Dr. Kirkland informed the Commission that the laboratories are improving on turn-around times therefore the deadline for the 2024 Annual Drug Report will also be September 30, 2025.
- 2023 Annual Workload Report: Mrs. Megan Neel advised that the report was posted and sent out on October 17, 2024.
- 2022 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that we received the extension for the 2022 Paul Coverdell Grant. Mrs. Williams advised that if any districts need an extension to contact her or Candace Pridgeon to execute the extension.
- 2023 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Mrs. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that funds have been released and Grants are working on reimbursements. Mrs. Williams reminded the districts to make their purchases and get the reimbursement forms submitted. Mrs. Williams also informed the Districts that Candace has sent out an email to the districts for UEI's and asked that those districts respond with the necessary information.

## **ISSUE NUMBER 3: UHR ID SERVICES AND FIGG UPDATE**

- Deputy Director Leigh Clark of FDLE's Forensic Services gave an update on the Missing and Unidentified Human Remains (MUHR) Program and the Forensic Investigative Genetic Genealogy Grant (FIGG) Program. Ms. Clark gave an in-depth presentation on the expanded services that are being offered, the criteria for participation, and the FIGG-specific funding sources. The grant is open to local and state law enforcement agencies, Florida medical examiners offices, perpetrator cases, homicide victims, and unidentified human remains doe cases. Ms. Clark further explained the requirements for the FIGG Program submission process. PowerPoint presentation available by request.

#### **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. There were several new and significant findings of drugs in decedents during the last quarter. Most notably is the increase in the prevalence of N-isopropyl butylone, a novel synthetic stimulant and substituted cathinone. Further, there are additional reports of “pink cocaine” in Miami/Dade County. “Pink cocaine” is typically ketamine mixed with other substances including caffeine, cocaine, methamphetamine, MDMA and/or new psychoactive substances. Illicitly manufactured fentanyl is still the most frequently identified drug in decedents; and polysubstance use with fentanyl is common and includes cocaine and methamphetamine. Other drugs identified in decedents include bromazolam, N,N-dimethylpentylone, fluorofentanyl, PiHP, and xylazine. The toxicology laboratory directors continue to meet bimonthly to discuss the prevalence and emergence of drugs in the state of Florida. Participants of the meeting include representatives from the Medical Examiners Commission, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Florida Department of Health. The last meeting of the toxicology directors was held on October 7, 2024.

#### **ISSUE NUMBER 5: OTHER BUSINESS**

- Ken Jones, State Registrar with the Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, informed the Commission that out of state physicians were able to sign-off on death certificates. Mr. Jones advised the Commission and medical examiners to contact his office if there are any questions regarding the circumstances in which an out of state physician may sign-off on a death certificate. There was a discussion between Mr. Jones and the audience, unfortunately due to technical difficulties audio was not available. Please refer to Mr. Jones for any additional questions.

**With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 11:12 A.M.**