

MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING

Orlando Marriott Lake Mary
1501 International Parkway
Lake Mary, FL 32751
February 17, 2026, 10:00 AM EST

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 and staff members to introduce themselves.

Commission members present:

Barbara C. Wolf, M.D., Districts 5 & 24 Medical Examiner
Brian Fernandes, J.D., Chief Assistant Statewide Prosecutor, Office of the Attorney General
Kenneth T. Jones, State Registrar, Department of Health
Robin Giddens Sheppard, L.F.D., Funeral Director
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:

Ashley Bullard
Natalie Bielby, J.D.

Megan Neel
Ashley Williams

District Medical Examiners present:

James Fulcher, M.D. (District 7)
Milad Webb, M.D. (District 8)

Sajid S. Qaiser, M.D. (District 18)
Jon R. Thogmartin, M.D. (District 6)

Other District personnel present:

Bill Pellan (District 6)
Sheri Blanton (District 9/25)
Chrissy Nieten (District 1)

Kim Loucks (District 19)
Lauren Newbanks (District 8)
Thomas Steinkamp (District 17)

Guests present:

Matthew Sharp (FDLE, Research Manager)
Chad Brown (FDLE, Director)
Steve Outlaw (FDLE, Deputy Director)
Larry Bedore (FEMORS)
Bernard Brzezinski (FEMORS)
Heather Hensley (LWVI)
Christina During (Florida Department of Health)
Blake Scott (Florida Department of Health)
Madeline Black (Lifequest)
Heather Markuson (Lifequest)

Victoria Poney (Legacy Donor Services Foundation)
Patricia Darrigan (Legacy Donor Services Foundation)
Elizabeth Shaller (South Florida Donor Network)
Darren Lahrman (LifeLink of Florida)
Bobby Nibhanupudy (OurLegacy)
Kesper Stetz (OurLegacy)

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 OCTOBER 28, 2025 MEDICAL EXAMINERS COMMISSION MEETING.

ISSUE NUMBER 1: INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

- Election of Chair: MEC Staff Manager Ashley Bullard, informed the Commission that according to Florida Statute 406, the Commission needs to appoint a new chairman for the calendar year of 2026. Commission member Amira Fox nominated Dr. Barbara Wolf. The motion was made, seconded, and passed unanimously for the Commission to approve Dr. Barbara Wolf as the new Chairman. Dr. Wolf recused herself from voting.
- Status Report: MEC Appointments and Reappointments: Ms. Bullard informed the Commission that the MEC County Commissioner chair is still vacant and we are still awaiting appointments/reappointments from the Governor's Appointments Office.
- Status Report: DME Appointment and Reappointments: Ms. Bullard informed the Commission that all district medical examiners are currently pending either appointment or reappointment. Ms. Bullard advised we are still waiting on appointments from the Governor.
- 2026 Reappointments/ Assessments for District 15-24: Ms. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that all ballots were sent out on January 6, 2026. The results will be presented at the May MEC meeting.
- 2025 Interim Drug Report: Ms. Megan Neel informed the Commission that drug data has been received and is being compiled. Ms. Neel advised the Commission that it should be published soon.
- 2025 Annual Workload Report: Ms. Megan Neel advised that the deadline for the 2025 Annual Drug Report is May 31, 2026. Ms. Neel again advised if the Districts have an issue, to reach out to her.
- 2024 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Ms. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that we are still accepting reimbursements for the 2024 Paul Coverdell Grant. Ms. Williams advised that an extension was received for the 2024 Paul Coverdell Grant but it would be closing September 30, 2026.
- 2025 Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grant Program Status Update: Ms. Ashley Williams informed the Commission that funds have not been released therefore asked districts to withhold from making purchases until the BJA release funds.

ISSUE NUMBER 2: Unidentified Deceased Initiative

Ms. Ashley Bullard reported the following success stories from District 17.

On September 28, 1981, the decedent was found decomposed floating in a lake in Broward County. The decedent was the victim of a homicide and there were no leads as to her identity and the case went cold. In November of 2025, the Broward County Sheriff's Office was working on a possible missing person matching that of the unidentified remains. The sheriff's office compared the decedent's fingerprints to missing persons, with no match. The sheriff's office then resubmitted the decedent's fingerprints into the database and got a hit from an old arrest record out of a neighboring jurisdiction. The sheriff's office made contact with the family and notify them of the identification.

On September 27, 2023, an adult female was fatally struck by a vehicle while crossing State Road 7 in Lauderdale Lakes, Florida. The decedent had no identification, and fingerprint searches yielded no matches in the databases. A composite sketch was issued and shown to neighboring jurisdictions to identify potential missing persons but was unsuccessful. In September of 2025, a records custodian at the District 17 Medical Examiner's office noticed a recent social media post regarding a 32-year-old female recently reported missing from Lauderhill, Florida. The female was last seen 2 years earlier near State Road 7 in Lauderhill, Florida. Recognizing similarities to the 2023 unidentified decedent, the custodian alerted investigators to the recent missing person post. Subsequent DNA analysis from the family confirmed the decedent's identity.

ISSUE NUMBER 3: LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

- Senate Bill 188: Legal Counsel, Natalie Bielby informed the Commission of updates on Senate Bill 188, relating to the Medical Examiner's Duties. This bill requires medical examiners to document and report certain infant and child autopsy findings to a national registry, with penalties for noncompliance. Mrs. Bielby informed the Commission that the Department of Health would impose escalating fines and decisional disciplinary action for failure to report within established timelines. As of February 11, 2026, the bill has yet to be taken up in committee.
- Senate Bill 524/House Bill 849: Legal Counsel, Natalie Bielby informed the Commission of updates on Senate Bill 524/House Bill 849, relating to Department of Law Enforcement. This bill revises the appointment processes for the Medical Examiners Commission and district medical examiners, clarifies the Commission's independence, and clarifies the training responsibilities of the Criminal Justice Standards and Training Commission. As of February 11, 2026, it was temporarily postponed in fiscal committee.

ISSUE NUMBER 4: NOMINATION FOR DISTRICT 8 MEDICAL EXAMINER

MEC Staff Manager Ashley Bullard informed the Commission that the search committee for District 8 has completed its search and has nominated Dr. Milad Webb as the District 8 Medical Examiner. Dr. Webb expressed his gratitude and looks forward to taking the position in Gainesville and helping the surrounding counties.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY AMIRA FOX, SECONDED BY BRIAN FERNANDES, AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO MOVE FORWARD WITH RECOMMENDATION OF APPOINTMENT FOR DISTRICT 8 MEDICAL EXAMINER TO THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE.

ISSUE NUMBER 5: ORGAN PROCUREMENT ORGANIZATION ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Darren Lahrman of LifeLink presented the 2025 annual report for Florida's organ procurement organizations. Mr. Lahrman reported there were 2 transplant denials reported in 2025 for whole and partial organ donors. Mr. Lahrman thanked the medical examiners for the outstanding relationship they have with the organ procurement organizations in Florida.

ISSUE NUMBER 6: REVIEW AND MODIFICATION OF 11G

MEC Staff Manager, Ashley Bullard presented the Commission with anticipated changes to Rule 11G, F.A.C., due to 2026 legislation and procedure updates. Ms. Bullard also discussed Chapter 120 Florida Statute that was modified in the 2025 legislative session. As part of the modification all Florida Administrative Code rules are required to be reviewed within a 5-year cycle. The Commission was asked to review and determine if scheduled rules needed updating verses no action.

Rule 11G 1.001 and 5.002 has no anticipated changes. The Commission did not wish to discuss or recommend change.

Rule 11G - 2.005, 5.003, and 5.004, have recommended changes related to the appointments of the District Medical Examiners and being appointed by the Medical Examiners Commission and are contingent on pending legislative changes. The Commission did not wish to discuss the recommended changes that were proposed.

Rule 11G - 2.002, the recommended change to is to remove the Florida Department of Law Enforcement from the biometric process and add a policy change to include jurisdictional agencies should upload fingerprints directly into the appropriate databases.

The Commission chose to block vote moving forward with the changes to Rule 11G - 2.005, 5.003, 5.004 and 2.002.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY KENNETH JONES, SECONDED BY ROBIN GIDDENS SHEPPARD, AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO MOVE FORWARD WITH APPROVING THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO RULE 11G DEPENDENT ON THE 2026 PROPOSED LEGISLATION IN SB524/HB849 PASSING.

ISSUE NUMBER 7: MASS FATALITY PLANS/ FEMORS

- Commission Chairman, Dr. Barbara Wolf provided the Commission with an update on the Mass Fatality Plan. The MEC began the process in conjunction with FEMORS of reviewing the fatality management response plan in previous meetings, the proposed final language changes were provided to the Commission in the meeting packet. No discussion was had.

A MOTION WAS MADE BY BRIAN FERNANDES, SECONDED BY ROBIN GIDDENS SHEPPARD, AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY FOR THE COMMISSION TO APPROVE THE CHANGE TO THE MASS FATALITY PLAN.

ISSUE NUMBER 8: EMERGING DRUGS UPDATE

Ms. Megan Neel provided the Commission with an update on new drug trends on behalf of Bruce Goldberger, Ph.D. Ms. Neel reported toxicology laboratory directors continue to report significant decreases in the prevalence of new psychoactive substances in decedents including novel benzodiazepines, cathinones, fentanyl analogs, and nitazenes in decedents. Cocaine, fentanyl, and methamphetamine continue to be the predominate substances identified in decedents. Laboratories are closely monitoring the shift of nitazenes to -orphine derivatives. Another substance of concern is 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH), a pharmacologically-active metabolite of mitragynine (Kratom), with an opioid receptor affinity significantly greater than morphine. 7-OH is a Schedule I controlled substance in the state of Florida. NPS and other substances identified in casework includes alpha-PiHPP (isoPV8), bromazolam, carfentanil, desalkylgidazepam, etizolam, ketamine, methylenedioxymethamphetamine, MDMB-4en-PINACA, ortho-methyl fentanyl, and pyrazolam. Adulterants identified in the quarterly crime laboratory drug report include BTMPS, medetomidine, and xylazine.

ISSUE NUMBER 6: OTHER BUSINESS

- Dr. James Fulcher, District 7 Medical Examiner and President of the Florida Association of Medical Examiners (FAME) addressed the Commission and advised that FAME has rolled out a new online

membership database that will take FAME into a better spot with technology, allowing members to pay dues online.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 10:37 A.M.