



*American Academy of Forensic Sciences
American Society of Crime Laboratory Directors
International Association for Identification
National Association of Medical Examiners
Society of Forensic Toxicologists/ American Board of Forensic Toxicology*

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MEDICAL EXAMINER AND NAMUS LEGISLATION

REQUEST

Support of medical examiner legislation to increase the number and retention of forensic pathologists. Authorize NamUs to assist in timely identifications of missing/unidentified persons.

BACKGROUND

In 2013, the Department of Justice not only recognized a critical shortage of board-certified Forensic Pathologists, but that it was rapidly approaching a crisis stage. It is now in crisis with offices unable to meet their statutory obligations in a timely fashion (see links below). Currently, there are approximately 500 full-time practicing forensic pathologists in the US. There is a need for 1200-1500 to provide full national coverage. The National Commission on Forensic Science (NCFS) recognized the critical role that forensic pathologists shoulder in support of this nation's public health, public safety, and criminal justice systems, as well as providing critical information to the families of decedents and their attending physicians. The NCFS correctly identified that the shortages were caused by both an inability to recruit and retain Forensic Pathologists.

In support of this all-important issue, legislation should be developed to codify these NIJ/BJA programs, which would ensure adequate funding along with the necessary guidelines for these programs. This legislation should include:

- Encourage and incentivize qualified medical graduates to enter the practice of forensic pathology by funding forensic pathology fellowship slots. The grants will be provided to accredited forensic pathology fellowship programs.
- Encourage and incentivize qualified individuals to enter the field of medicolegal death investigation by creating grants to support forensic medicine service providers to train, educate, and certify medicolegal death investigators.
- Incentivize qualified individuals to enter forensic pathology fellowships, attain board certification as forensic pathologists, and continue employment as board certified forensic pathologists by implementing a student loan forgiveness program.

This legislation will also codify the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs). NamUs is the national information clearinghouse and resource center for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed person cases across the United States. It will also provide authority for the sharing of information between NamUs databases and the FBI's databases to ensure the effectiveness of a national approach.

References:

1. NIJ Report to Congress: [Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices](#), 2020.
2. National Commission on Forensic Science: [Increasing the Number, Retention, and Quality of Board-Certified Forensic Pathologists](#), approved 2015
3. [ABA Journal: Shortage of forensic pathologists, coupled with COVID-19, has caused major delays in cases](#)
4. [PEW: Too Many Bodies, Too Few Forensic Pathologists](#)

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