



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

November 28, 2022

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Becerra,

We are writing to provide you and your staff an update on the status of forensic science's role in public health and request that you consider several critical needs facing our community as you develop your agency's FY24 budget.

Medical examiners, coroners, and toxicologists have a particularly multifaceted role among forensic science practitioners and forensic medicine providers in the United States. They participate in the nation's criminal justice system and are also key members of the public health system. Regrettably, there is a workforce crisis in this community as well as an extraordinary increase in their workload due to COVID and the country's raging drug crisis. Recent provisional data from the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) indicate that there were an estimated 102,842 reported overdose deaths (OD) deaths in the June 2022 twelve-month look-back data in the US. This figure represents an increase of 24% from the 82,916 reported OD deaths from the June 2020 look-back data. At the state level, some have experienced an even higher increase. For example, Alaska experienced a 31.1% increase and South Dakota experienced a 32.4% increase in 2022 data. Despite this, funding has not increased to match that need, nor has there been a significant effort from the federal government to assist in resolving the workforce crisis. We ask that you consider this when assessing how to fund critical community programs to solve this issue.

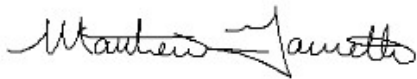
The Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations (CFSO), representing its 22,000 members, has worked with its member organizations (the National Association of Medical Examiners, the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, the American Society of Crime Lab Directors, the American Academy of Forensic Science, the International Association for Identification, the Society of Forensic Toxicologists, and the American Board of Toxicologists) to develop our most critical priorities for FY24. They are as follows:

1. **GRANT FUNDING:** Increase and set aside funding for medical examiners, coroners, and toxicologists in the Opioid Overdose Prevention and Surveillance Program for forensic science. All the quality data about intoxication deaths are provided to the public health community from medical examiner/coroner (ME/C) offices in conjunction with forensic toxicology labs. Despite the critical nature of this information, our community finds itself not only struggling with a workforce issue, but with an issue of a significant increase in workload despite no increase in funding. Specifically, our offices need support for comprehensive toxicology testing as well as additional staff and supplies to include more staffing and equipment for toxicology testing, autopsies, scene investigations, transport of bodies, interactions with next of kin, and data entry.

2. IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON DATA EXCHANGE IN MEDICOLEGAL DEATH INVESTIGATION (MDI-DATA-WG): Over the past two years, the Department of Justice and the Department of Health and Human Services have worked on studying how best to modernize medicolegal death investigations. The initial work of that group has culminated in a report with recommendations regarding data collection needed by ME/C offices, data system upgrades needed at ME/C offices to support the collection of that data, and the public databases and data exchange systems, standards, and systems needed to support the exchange of data between ME/C offices, forensic science laboratories, public health entities, law enforcement first responders and investigators, and many other stakeholders involved in this work. We urge your office to implement these recommendations and provide adequate funding for our forensic science and forensic medical communities to implement these recommendations in their respective jurisdictions and areas of responsibility. A large amount of federal and state infrastructure development will be needed to carry out the recommendations made by this working group.

We respectfully request a meeting with you or your staff to discuss these critical issues facing our community and the stakeholders we serve. Thank you for your consideration of our requests.

Respectfully,



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CFSO Chair



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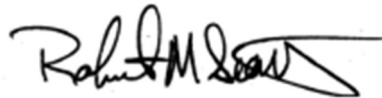
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