



*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*

Strengthening the Medical Examiner and Coroner System Act

Building the Workforce Needed to Protect Public Health, Public Safety, and the Administration of Justice

Executive Summary:

Medicolegal death investigations are essential to the nation's public health, public safety, and criminal justice systems. Medical examiners, coroners, forensic pathologists, and medicolegal death investigators determine causes and manners of death, support criminal investigations, monitor emerging public health threats, and provide families with answers following loss of a loved one.

The **Strengthening the Medical Examiner and Coroner System Act** would address the nation's critical workforce shortage by expanding education, training, certification, and financial support for forensic pathology and medicolegal death investigation programs. Investing in this workforce is essential to ensuring timely death investigations, strengthening public health surveillance, and improving the administration of justice.

The Challenge:

The United States faces a severe and growing shortage of qualified forensic pathology professionals.

Current Workforce Needs

- Only **750–850** full-time, practicing board-certified forensic pathologists currently serve the United States.
- Experts estimate that **at least 1,600** forensic pathologists are needed to provide adequate national coverage.
- Many medical examiner and coroner offices face prolonged vacancies, increasing caseloads, and significant delays in death investigations.

These shortages result in delayed autopsies, slower criminal investigations, reduced public health surveillance, and prolonged uncertainty for grieving families. They also limit the nation's ability to identify emerging threats such as opioid overdoses, infectious disease outbreaks, and other preventable causes of death.

Medicolegal death investigators—the professionals who respond to death scenes, document evidence, and gather critical investigative information—are equally vital to determining accurate causes and manners of death. Yet they face many of the same recruitment, training, and retention challenges.

The Solution:

The **Strengthening the Medical Examiner and Coroner System Act** would strengthen the nation's MDI system by:

- Expanding training opportunities and career pathways for future board-certified forensic pathologists.
- Supporting accredited forensic pathology fellowship programs to increase both the number and geographic distribution of training opportunities.
- Expanding education, certification, and workforce development for medicolegal death investigators.
- Providing funding for forensic medicine service providers and the toxicology labs that support death investigations.

Why This Matters:

A strong medicolegal death investigation system is fundamental to:

- Accurate and timely death certification.
- Effective criminal investigations and prosecutions.
- Public health surveillance and emergency preparedness.
- Monitoring overdose deaths and emerging health threats.
- Providing families with timely answers and closure.
- Supporting evidence-based public policy and prevention efforts.

Without sufficient forensic pathology and MDI capacity, both the justice system and public health infrastructure are at risk.

Policy Recommendation:

Congress should enact the **Strengthening the Medical Examiner and Coroner System Act of 2024** to address the nation's critical workforce shortage through sustained investment in education, training, certification, and forensic medicine infrastructure. Strengthening the medicolegal death investigation system will improve public safety, enhance public health preparedness, support accurate death investigations, and ensure that families receive timely and reliable answers during times of loss. Investing in this workforce is an investment in safer communities, stronger public health systems, and an effective justice system.