CFSO
Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations

*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*

October 31, 2026

# MEDICAL EXAMINER AND CORONER (MEC) LEGISLATION

## REQUEST

Support of medical examiner and coroner legislation (MEC Bill) to increase the number and retention of forensic pathologists, certified medical legal death investigators, and forensic toxicology staff.

## 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 only 750-800 full-time, practicing forensic pathologists in the US. There is a need for 1600 full-time forensic pathologists to provide full national coverage. Without the ability to determine the correct cause of death in a timely manner, criminal investigations and public health are put at risk. Medicolegal death investigators are the first line of these investigations and play a key role in obtaining scene and circumstantial information to help inform the ultimate determination of the cause and manner of death. Staffing of forensic toxicology laboratories is needed for the detection of expanding novel drug problem. 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 ensure adequate funding along with the necessary guidelines for these programs. This legislation should:

- Encourage and incentivize qualified medical school graduates to enter the practice of forensic pathology by expanding opportunities and pathways to train them to become board certified forensic pathologists.
- Provide support to accredited forensic pathology fellowship programs which will increase the number and geographical distributions of the programs.
- Encourage and incentivize qualified individuals to enter the field of medicolegal death investigation and obtain board certification by expanding pathways to train, educate, and certify medicolegal death investigators.
- Fund forensic medicine service providers and toxicology laboratories who support forensic medicine service providers.

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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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