NACo Policy Resolution Recommendation

Federal Support of Medical Examiners and Coroners

**Issue**: NACo supports the strengthening of Medical Examiner and Coroner offices to improve the quality and timeliness of medicolegal death investigations which directly impact the criminal justice and public health systems.

**Adopted Policy**: NACo supports and strongly encourages the implementation, support and funding of federal legislation that will provide grants and microgrants specific to strengthening Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices (ME/C) to improve the medicolegal death investigation system which is often managed at the county level. NACo supports the development, implementation and funding of national standards, certification of personnel, accreditation of ME/C offices and data modernization of the medicolegal death investigation system.

1. COMEC: The Collaborating Office for Medical Examiners and Coroners (COMEC) which is housed under the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) should be fully funded.
2. Quality of Personnel: The Department of Justice (DOD) and the COMEC should provide programs to fund training and the certification of forensic pathologists and medicolegal death investigators.
3. Accreditation: The DOD and the COMEC should provide funding to ME/C offices to meet national office accreditation requirements and national standards related to forensic medicolegal death investigations.
4. Data Modernization & Interoperability: Federal funding should be available to ensure ME/Cs have access to, and utilize, electronic case management systems to allow interoperability between forensic/criminal justice and public health stakeholders.

**Background**: The majority of medicolegal death investigation systems are managed and funded at the county level. Medicolegal death investigation has become more specialized, technical, costly, and public. The quality of a forensic death investigation should not be determined by the size or wealth of a county government. The ME/C should not make autopsy, toxicology or other medicolegal death investigation decisions based on a county budget but rather ensure that these investigations meet national accreditation requirements and national standards. County governments have a vested interest in how deaths are investigated in their community. These investigations impact: The overall budget; how decedents and survivors, whether citizens or visitors, are treated and represented; the reputation of the County and related entities should a poorly executed death investigation become public; and may fiscally impact a county should there be civil litigation related to a death investigation.

**Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact**: County governments fund local medicolegal jurisdictions often without federal or state stipends. The cost to ensure a thorough and competent medicolegal death investigation has risen as well as the cost to ensure personnel are trained and certified. The federal government has a vested interest in ensuring these systems are operating at a high level regardless of the size or wealth of the county as these investigations impact national statistics, national criminal justice decisions as well as national public health decisions. Ensuring the public’s trust in the medicolegal death investigation system is not just a local county issue but a federal one as well.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Bobbi Jo O’Neal, RN, BSN, F-ABMDI, F-AAFS

Charleston County Coroner

Charleston, SC

\* International Association of Coroners & Medical Examiners (IACME): Chairwoman of the Board of Directors:

\*Consortium of Forensic Science Organizations (CFSO): Board of Directors

For questions: Boneal@charlestoncounty.org or 843-822-6868