

M E M O



**County
Administrator**

Robert W. Wilson
701-241-5770
wilsonro@casscountynd.gov

TO: County Commissioners
FROM: Robert W. Wilson
DATE: January 12, 2021
SUBJECT: Coroner Personnel Requests

The Coroner's Office has experienced a significant caseload increase recently, resulting in a request for an unbudgeted staffing increase in 2021. The request is to convert a current .5 Death Investigator position to a full-time Death Investigator and a .2 Death Investigator to a .5 Death Investigator. If approved, the office requests making the changes immediately.

The caseload increase is attributed to several factors. Most notably there has been a significant and steady increase over several years in the number of deaths attributed to suicide and overdoses.

I have attached a spreadsheet detailing the office caseload over the last five years. The number of autopsies the office has been involved in has increased by 38%. The Coroner's office does not preform autopsies, but all autopsies must be transported to and from the UND Medical School in Grand Forks. The number of cases the office directly investigated has increased 89% in the past 5 years.

A contributing factor is Sanford Hospital's designation several years ago as a Level 1 Trauma Center. The facility has seen a significant increase in critical patients transferred in. When a death investigation is required, by law that burden falls on the county where the death occurs, even if the events leading to death occurred in another jurisdiction. As a regional medical hub, there is no reason to expect this trend will reverse itself.

Also, since being named Coroner, Kriste Ross has taken on administrative duties that were previously handled by Dr. Baird, reducing her time available for casework.

Commissioner Scherling and I met with Ms. Ross last week to discuss the office needs and the timing of this request. The individual previously in the .5 Investigator position has resigned. Ms. Ross knows of a trained Death Investigator who would potentially be interested in relocating to Fargo and believes this position can be filled quickly. The current .2 is staffed, and that individual is available for additional hours.

Caseload challenges have been an office concern for some time, and the office has tried to be creative in addressing challenges without a staff increase. A year and-a-half ago the office contracted with FM Ambulance for a livery services (the removal of bodies from scenes and transport to the morgue) in an effort to reduce the number of calls staff must attend to—this was not as effective as anticipated and added a county expense.

PO Box 2806
211 Ninth Street South
Fargo, North Dakota 58108

www.casscountynd.gov

County Commissioners
January 12, 2021
Page 2

I have worked with the Finance Office to identify the budgetary impact of this request. If both personnel requests are approved, the maximum 2021 budget impact depending on benefit selections and start dates will be approximately \$64,040.50.

SUGGESTED MOTION:

Move to convert a current .5 Death Investigator to a full-time Death Investigator and a .2 Death Investigator to a .5 Death Investigator for the Cass County Coroner's Office.

Coroner's Budget	Current Budget	Proposed Changes	Revised Budget
Full Time Salaries			
Coroner	\$ 78,804.96		\$ 78,804.96
Deputy Coroner	\$ 67,293.65		\$ 67,293.65
Full Time Death Investigator		\$ 45,040.32	\$ 45,040.32
Total Full Time Salaries	\$ 146,098.61	\$ 45,040.32	\$ 191,138.93
Hourly Salaries			
Death Investigator 1/2 time	\$ 22,520.16	\$ (22,520.16)	\$ -
Death Investigator 1/4 time	\$ 9,008.04	\$ 11,260.08	\$ 20,268.12
Drivers	\$ 20,000.04		\$ 20,000.04
Total Hourly Salaries	\$ 51,528.24	\$ (11,260.08)	\$ 40,268.16
On Call Pay	\$ 3,000.00		\$ 3,000.00
Total Salary Budget	\$ 200,626.85	\$ 33,780.24	\$ 234,407.09
Benefits Budget			
Social Security	\$ 11,525.00	\$ 2,095.00	\$ 13,620.00
Medicare	\$ 2,695.00	\$ 490.00	\$ 3,185.00
Worker's Comp	\$ 915.00	\$ (472.74)	\$ 442.26
Retirement	\$ 20,673.00	\$ 4,142.00	\$ 24,815.00
Health Insurance	\$ 20,088.00	\$ 23,286.00	\$ 43,374.00
Dental Insurance	\$ 480.00	\$ 720.00	\$ 1,200.00
Total Benefits	\$ 56,376.00	\$ 30,260.26	\$ 86,636.26
Total Salaries and Benefites	\$ 257,002.85	\$ 64,040.50	\$ 321,043.35

The request is to convert a current .5 Death Investigator position to a full-time Death Investigator and a .2 Death Investigator to a .5 Death Investigator.

Coroner's Office Caseload & Staffing

Year:	# of Cases Reported	# of Autopsies	# of Transports	# of Office Employees
2015	377		74	1 FTE, 1 contracted
2016	421		111	2 FTE's
2017	510		81	2 FTE's
2018	546		97	2 FTE's
2019	652		110	120 2 FTE's, 2 contracted 2 FTE's, 2 part-time (.5 &
2020	714		102	147 .2), 2 contracted 3 FTE's, 1 part-time (.5), 2 contracted
(Requested) 2021				
Percentage Increase	89%		38%	