

**PERFORMANCE AUDIT
OF THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY
CORONER'S OFFICE**

March 16, 2005

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December 17, 2004

Honorable Cyril H. Wecht
Coroner
Morgue Building
542 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219-2947

**SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE AUDIT OF THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY
CORONER'S OFFICE**

Dear Coroner Wecht:

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Coroner's Office. Our objective was to provide an independent assessment as to whether or not the Coroner's Office is efficiently and economically executing its functions.

Our audit disclosed that the Coroner's Office can enhance the management of its workflows by implementing a centralized database that tracks and reports on the status of cases being processed, including backlogs, and the location of evidence.

Coroner Wecht
December 17, 2004

We would like to thank the management and staff of the Coroner's Office for the courtesy and cooperation extended to us during our audit.

Very truly yours,

Michael Wassil
Assistant Deputy, Auditing

MARK PATRICK FLAHERTY
Controller

cc: President and Members, Allegheny County Council
Mr. Joe Catanese, Council's Chief of Staff, Allegheny County
Honorable Dan Onorato, Chief Executive, Allegheny County
Mr. James M. Flynn, Jr., County Manager, Allegheny County
Ms. Amy Griser, Director, Allegheny County Department of Budget and Finance
Mr. Joseph Dominick, Chief Deputy Coroner, Allegheny County Coroner's Office

Executive Summary

Background

According to statute, some of the Coroner's responsibilities include the: (1) transportation to the Allegheny County (County) morgue and disposal of unidentified or unclaimed bodies of deceased individuals found within the County, (2) investigation of the circumstance, cause, and manner of sudden and unexpected, medically unattended, suspicious and violent deaths within the geographic boundaries of the County, and (3) determination as to whether an autopsy or an inquest should be conducted. The purpose of the Coroner's investigation is to determine the cause of death, and whether there is sufficient reason to believe that the death resulted from criminal acts or neglect.

In addition to the autopsy and inquest functions, the following is a brief description of the other significant functions of the Coroner's Office:

- The Investigations Division receives reports of deaths, transports bodies, conducts other investigatory procedures, and coordinates its findings with the Pathology, Toxicology, and Inquest Divisions.
- Toxicology provides post mortem forensic toxicology services, and human performance forensic toxicology services.
- Forensic Serology identifies and characterizes the physiological material found on evidence, and subsequently makes a comparison of the material to known standards. This section also examines physical evidence submitted in criminal cases, primarily homicides, sexual assaults, burglaries, robberies, and vehicular hit and run accidents.
- Forensic Chemistry analyzes physical evidence retained in the enforcement of state and federal drug laws.
- Photography provides services such as

Executive Summary

Background

photography, film processing, graphic illustration, and video and audio recording.

- Environmental Chemistry provides analytical support for the County's Division of Environmental Quality. This section specializes in analyzing air, water, and food samples.
- The Public Health Laboratory section of the Coroner's Office provides public health testing services for the residents and health care professionals.
- The Latent Prints Section provides fingerprint support services to all law enforcement agencies of the County, the Federal Bureau of Investigations, and the Drug Enforcement Administration.
- The Firearms/Toolmarks section performs a variety of functions, including examinations of firearms, bullets, cartridge cases, and shotshells for law enforcement agencies within the County.
- The Mobile Crime Unit, which is comprised of personnel from other divisions of the Coroner's Office, provides the necessary assistance to process a crime scene when an authorized law enforcement agency does not have the experience or the personnel to do so.
- Evidence room personnel receive evidence submitted internally, or by law enforcement agencies within the County for testing by other divisions. Items stored in the evidence room include controlled substances, and various weapons. The evidence room is staffed by three evidence custodians who are responsible for receiving evidence and ensuring its security.

Executive Summary

Background

The Coroner's Office had 106 employees in 2004. The Coroner's Office operating revenue and expenditures were as follows:

	Projected 2004	2003
Revenues	\$1,012,968	\$ 944,899
Expenditures:		
Salaries and Fringe Benefits	\$5,609,473	\$5,397,748
Other	776,614	818,316
Total Expenditures	\$6,386,087	\$6,216,064

Results in Brief

Our audit disclosed the following:

- The Coroner's Office lacks a centralized database that reports on the status of cases being processed, and the location of evidence. As a result, reporting on workflows, including backlogs, was not available, which can impede the effective management of operations.
- Evidence custodians are unable to readily determine when evidence should be returned to the submitting agency due to the lack of reporting on the status of cases being processed, and the location of evidence.
- The reporting by laboratories of test results is not in a consistent format and automated.
- Evidence data is manually recorded on certain forms, and a log book, and input into the Allegheny County Division of Laboratories Tracking System as time permits.

Executive Summary

Results in Brief

- Initial reports generated by deputies in the Investigations Division are not consistently reconciled to final reports to ensure that all reports are processed.
- The Coroner's Office security systems appear to be dated.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, we recommend the Coroner's Office:

- explore opportunities to implement a centralized database that would enable management to effectively monitor operations against goals and objectives. The system should be capable of reporting on backlogs, the status of cases being worked on, and the location of evidence;
- develop and implement standardized forms for reporting laboratory test results, and
- explore opportunities to modernize the security systems.

I. Background

Purpose

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Coroner's Office (Coroner). Our objective was to provide an independent assessment as to whether or not the Coroner is efficiently and economically executing its functions.

Background

According to statute, some of the Coroner's responsibilities include the: (1) transportation to the Allegheny County (County) morgue and disposal of unidentified or unclaimed bodies of deceased individuals found within the County, (2) investigation of the circumstance, cause, and manner of sudden and unexpected, medically unattended, suspicious and violent deaths within the geographic boundaries of the County, and (3) determination as to whether an autopsy or an inquest should be conducted. The purpose of the Coroner's investigation is to determine the cause of death, and whether there is sufficient reason to believe that the death resulted from criminal acts or neglect.

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I. Background

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I. Background

evidence room is staffed by three evidence custodians who are responsible for receiving evidence and ensuring its security.

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Other	776,614	818,316
Total Expenditures	\$6,386,087	\$6,216,064

The following schedules on pages 10 and 11 detail the final budgets. However, the adopted budgets for the Coroner's general fund expenditures for the years 2004 and 2003 were \$6,114,496 and \$6,274,689, respectively.

Allegheny County Coroner's Office
Schedule of Projected Revenues and Expenditures
January 1, 2004 through December 31, 2004

	Final Budget	Actual	Favorable (Unfavorable) Difference
Revenue			
Charges for Services and Facilities	\$ 202,500	\$ 247,332	\$ 44,832
State of Pennsylvania	255,100	750,000	494,900
Miscellaneous Receipts	15,000	15,636	636
Total	472,600	1,012,968	540,368
Expenditures			
Personnel	4,346,452	4,346,450	2
Fringe Benefits	1,263,029	1,263,023	6
Supplies	351,497	352,993	(1,496)
Services	233,469	233,486	(17)
Repairs and Maintenance	128,644	128,642	2
Minor Equipment	56,905	56,799	106
Materials	5,610	4,694	916
Total	6,385,606	6,386,087	(481)
Revenue Over/(Under) Expenditures	\$ (5,913,006)	\$ (5,373,119)	\$ 539,887

Allegheny County Coroner's Office
Schedule of Revenues and Expenditures
January 1, 2003 through December 31, 2003

	Final Budget	Actual	Favorable (Unfavorable) Difference
Revenue			
Charges for Services and Facilities	\$ 213,500	\$ 294,587	\$ 81,087
State of Pennsylvania	1,300,400	600,000	(700,400)
Miscellaneous Receipts	-	50,312	50,312
Total	<u>1,513,900</u>	<u>944,899</u>	<u>(569,001)</u>
Expenditures			
Personnel	4,256,529	4,256,418	111
Fringe Benefits	1,167,813	1,141,330	26,483
Supplies	426,972	417,781	9,191
Services	255,641	255,565	76
Repairs and Maintenance	126,012	122,801	3,211
Minor Equipment	18,598	19,588	(990)
Materials	4,124	2,581	1,543
Total	<u>6,255,689</u>	<u>6,216,064</u>	<u>39,625</u>
Revenue Over/(Under) Expenditures	\$ (4,741,789)	\$ (5,271,165)	\$ (529,376)

II. Scope and Methodology

We completed a performance audit of the Allegheny County Coroner's Office (Coroner). Our objective was to provide an independent assessment as to whether or not the Coroner is efficiently and economically executing its functions. Specifically, we:

- Interviewed staff and observed the workflows to gain an understanding of the activities of the Coroner;
- Prepared flowcharts of significant workflows;
- Analyzed certain work volumes and processing times;
- Obtained an understanding of the information technology used by the Coroner, and evaluated the adequacy of its use;
- Reviewed expenditures against the 2004 budget for reasonableness.

We conducted this audit from November 2004 to December 2004. We provided the Coroner with a draft copy of this report for comment. The response to the recommendations is presented in Appendix I, page 16.

III. Finding and Recommendations

Workflow Automation

Workflow automation can improve efficiency, result in cost savings by increasing productivity and accuracy, and allow for periodic assessments of performance against established goals and objectives.

During our audit, we noted the following:

- The Coroner's Office lacks a centralized database that reports on the status of cases being processed, and the location of evidence. As a result, reporting on workflows, including backlogs, was not available, which can impede the effective management of operations.
- Evidence custodians are unable to readily determine when evidence should be returned to the submitting agency due to the lack of reporting on the status of cases being processed, and the location of evidence.
- The reporting by laboratories of test results is not in a consistent format and automated.
- Evidence data is manually recorded on the Receipt for Submitted Materials/Custody Transfer forms, Test Request forms, and a log book, and certain data from the forms is then input into the Allegheny County Division of Laboratories Tracking System as time permits.
- Initial reports generated by deputies in the Investigations Division are not consistently reconciled to final reports to ensure that all reports are processed.
- The Coroner's Office security systems appear to be dated.

III. Finding and Recommendations

Recommendations

To improve efficiency, increase productivity and accuracy, and allow for periodic assessments of performance, we recommend that the Coroner's Office:

- explore opportunities to implement a centralized database that would enable management to effectively monitor operations against goals and objectives. The system should be capable of reporting on backlogs, the status of cases being worked on, and the location of evidence,
- develop and implement standardized forms for reporting laboratory test results, and
- explore opportunities to modernize the security systems.

Management Response

With regard to a centralized database, we agree that this has been a longstanding problem that we had identified years ago. We are now pleased to report that through aggressive grant acquisitions, we have acquired the appropriate monies to resolve this problem. In February 2005, we placed an order with Porter Lee Corporation, so as to update and replace the entire computer network in the Coroner's Office. This update will include a Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS) for our laboratory division and a new death investigation system tracking system for our morgue division. The software included with this system will generate standardized forms for all laboratory and death investigation results.

We are also actively exploring methods to update and modernize physical and computer security throughout all areas of our operation. Work has been ongoing with the Allegheny County Computer Services Division to make us HIPPA compliant, even though most of our operation is exempt from this federal law. Much emphasis is being placed on the identification and

III. Finding and Recommendations

appropriate solutions for our video-monitoring and swipe card system for physical security.

