

## **Idaho Criminal Justice Commission - Coroner Subcommittee Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** June 17, 2025

**Time:** 3:00 PM - 4:15 PM Mountain Time

**Facilitators:** Senator Melissa Wintrow and Kelli Brassfield (IAC) - *Note: Kelli Brassfield on vacation*

### **Attendees**

- Senator Melissa Wintrow, JLOC Co-chair
- Ryan Langrill, Director, Office of Performance Evaluations
- **Sydney Norsk, OPE Intern** (taking notes)
- Sheriff Bart Quayle, Fremont County
- Matthew Gamette, ISP Forensic Services
- Bernie LaSarte, Coeur d'Alene Tribe
- Will Carson, Twin Falls County Coroner
- Torey Danner, Bannock County Coroner
- Joshua Hall, Nez Perce County Coroner
- **John Fudenberg, Executive Director, International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners** (new participant)
- Brett Harding, Ada County Chief Deputy Coroner (joined briefly)

### **Subgroup Report: General Infrastructure**

#### **Primary Problems Identified:**

1. **Inconsistencies in autopsy practices across the state**
2. **Lack of adequate resources for autopsies**
3. **Need for additional pathology facilities beyond Ada County**
4. **Inconsistent resource distribution across counties of varying sizes**

#### **Solutions Discussed:**

##### **Advisory Board Structure**

- **Proposed composition:** Coroners, sheriffs, police chiefs, prosecutors, law enforcement, and other stakeholders
- **Purpose:** Create communication channels and make funding distribution decisions
- **Analogous models:** Idaho POST Council, Idaho Brand Board, Idaho Racing Commission
- **Function:** Provide stakeholder governance for resource distribution rather than top-down state control

### **Reimbursement Program for Autopsies**

- **Target:** Smaller counties lacking adequate autopsy funding

- **Priority focus:** Child autopsies (where Idaho ranks last nationally)
- **Structure:** Similar to EMS grant system - examining county needs and distributing funding accordingly
- **Administration:** ISP would manage the grant; stakeholder advisory board would make distribution decisions

### **East Idaho Pathology Facility Development**

- **Immediate opportunity:** Young pathologist completing fellowship next year and interested in Idaho
- **Starting location:** Potential partnership with existing facilities in Bonneville or Pocatello
- **Independence requirement:** Must maintain operational independence from Idaho State Police (per accreditation standards)
- **Precedent:** Montana runs forensic pathology through state lab with proper independence structure
- **Next steps:** Begin scoping facility requirements, partnerships, and funding mechanisms

### **Low-Hanging Fruit Solutions**

- **Matthew Gamette's observation:** Many counties lack basic supplies (gloves, PPE, body bags)
- **Proposed solution:** State-level purchasing and distribution system for basic supplies
- **Implementation:** Relatively simple for state agencies with purchasing contract access

### **Standardization of Autopsy Requirements**

#### **Current Problem:**

- Inconsistency in when autopsies are performed
- Point of contention between law enforcement and coroners often centers on autopsy decisions
- Law enforcement may bypass coroner by having prosecutor order autopsy (comes from coroner's budget)

#### **Proposed Solution:**

- **Legislation requiring "automatic" autopsies** for specific case types
- **Priority cases identified:** Child deaths, homicides, suspicious deaths
- **Caveat:** Must ensure adequate facility capacity before mandating increased autopsy volume

### **Accreditation Discussion (John Fudenberg)**

#### **Key Finding:**

- **Counties can obtain IACME accreditation without their own autopsy facility** if they use an already-accredited facility

### **Benefits of Accreditation:**

1. **Reduced county liability** by demonstrating adherence to national standards
2. **Public trust and transparency** - shows highest standard of service
3. **Staff training requirements** improve investigation quality
4. **Federal funding opportunities** - some grants only available to accredited offices
5. **Legal credibility** - important for court testimony and prosecution

### **Current Status:**

- **Tory Danner's perspective:** Accreditation is "the best way to explain to the public that we are operating at the highest bar"
- **Standard clarification:** Accreditation represents "bare minimum standards" rather than best practice, making it achievable

### **Action Items**

1. **Senator Wintrow and Ryan Langrill:** Meet to discuss mapping out identified issues and solutions
2. **All subcommittee members:** Continue brainstorming on the grid worksheet
  - Include considerations for office space and other resource needs
3. **Senator Wintrow:** Contact prosecutor Matt Fredback to join subcommittee
  - **Note:** This was identified as a missed action item from previous meeting
4. **Confidentiality subgroup follow-up:** Address records confidentiality issue
  - **Status:** July 1 meeting proposed for confidentiality subgroup
5. **Future exploration:** Define specific cases that should constitute "automatic" autopsies