



*Cobb County...Expect the Best!*

***INTERNAL AUDIT DEPARTMENT***

***Report Number 2016-006***

***First and FINAL Follow-up Report: Survey  
of Cobb County Medical Examiner's Office  
Operations***

***July 25, 2016***

***Latona Thomas, CPA, Director  
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# COBB COUNTY INTERNAL AUDIT

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Director

July 25, 2016

## MEMORANDUM

TO: David Hankerson, County Manager

FROM: Latona Thomas, CPA, Director 

SUBJECT: **First and FINAL Follow-up Report** – Survey of the Cobb County Medical Examiner's Office Operations

We completed our follow-up review of the original subject report. Our objective was limited to reviewing, as of April 14, 2016, the status of proposed actions by the Board of Commissioners (BOC) and Medical Examiner's Office (MEO) to implement the twenty-seven recommendations in Report #2014-004, dated October 2, 2014. This follow-up should be read in conjunction with the original report and does not represent a complete reexamination of the activities. The auditor's role in follow-up reviews is to compile corrective actions taken by the auditee, assess whether those actions are adequate to correct the reported deficiencies, and relay those results to County management.

Fourteen recommendations were fully implemented. Several changes are directly tied to the overall changes in the MEO organizational structure and reporting hierarchy. The BOC created Chief and Deputy Chief Medical Examiner positions as contract County employees, and the MEO's letterhead was updated to reflect the current structure. Both positions are required to be medical doctors licensed to practice medicine in the State of Georgia or have the ability to obtain Georgia licensure as required by state law, have successfully completed designated residencies, and hold a certification by the American Board of Pathology. The MEO reports administratively and functionally to the County Manager with ongoing monitoring and monthly status meetings to discuss operations and caseload information. In addition, the Chief and Deputy Medical Examiners have completed the required supervisory training courses and are required to meet the annual continuing education requirements to maintain their license and certifications. New changes also require forensic investigators to maintain certifications. The use of County facilities and its employees in a Medical Examiner's private practice was discontinued and the current Chief and Deputy Medical Examiners do not perform private autopsies.

The MEO also implemented procedures to ensure cases are completed in under 90 days for 90% of cases, to include quarterly reports to monitor and document the results. The procedures for retention and destruction of medications have been updated to minimize the amount of medications recovered by forensic investigators and to limit access, if recovered. Finally, the MEO has created a webpage to reflect its pertinent information and will continue to explore other options to increase functionality for public use.

Ten recommendations were deemed partially implemented and still in process. Discussions have been initiated to assess the appropriateness of the exemption list in the County's Policy for the Procurement of Professional Services with a revised completion date of December 31, 2016. In addition, the MEO has initiated discussions regarding the use of Associate Medical Examiners as a contingency option with specific expectations and requirements. The MEO also completed a self-assessment for professional accreditation, identified current deficiencies, and developed proposed corrective actions. Some corrective actions have already been completed or are in process to include, but not limited to the following: a comprehensive policies and procedures manual is currently being developed and reviewed internally; training programs for forensic investigators, forensic technicians, and interns are being developed and implemented; database software systems are being explored to replace the current case management system; and physical security and access measures have been revised pending the construction of a new facility. The physical inventory of the MEO property and evidence room is partially completed; however, collaboration with the judicial system and law enforcement is ongoing to ensure the process fully meets the needs of stakeholders. Finally, discussions are ongoing within the MEO regarding how to obtain and measure performance feedback. A pilot feedback program will be tested on law enforcement stakeholders within the next year followed by the inclusion of other stakeholder feedback and complaints.

One recommendation to competitively bid the Medical Examiner services is no longer applicable based on the revised changes to the MEO organizational structure and reporting hierarchy. Two additional recommendations were evaluated by the Chief and Deputy Medical Examiners for current applicability and found to be cost prohibitive. The elimination of forensic technicians on weekends resulted in an increased workload on the Medical Examiners, and the process to apply for a Coverdale Grant was deemed too time-consuming for the existing staffing resource constraints. This option, along with other grant opportunities may be re-visited in the future. Internal Audit does not take exception with these items as presented.

We will not perform any additional follow-up. MEO management should continue its efforts to implement the corrective actions and assumes the risk if not completed.

We appreciate the cooperation extended to us by the MEO staff during our follow-up review. Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this report, please contact me at extension 2559 or Megan Pickens, Auditor, at 2557.

**Distribution:**

Dr. Christopher Gullledge, Chief Medical Examiner  
Cobb County Audit Committee  
Internal Audit Department File