

M00F05
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Operating Budget Data

(\$ in Thousands)

	<u>FY 05</u> <u>Actual</u>	<u>FY 06</u> <u>Working</u>	<u>FY 07</u> <u>Allowance</u>	<u>FY 06-07</u> <u>Change</u>	<u>% Change</u> <u>Prior Year</u>
General Fund	\$7,413	\$7,551	\$7,904	\$353	4.7%
Federal Fund	230	156	179	23	15.1%
Reimbursable Fund	<u>93</u>	<u>129</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>-54</u>	<u>-41.6%</u>
Total Funds	\$7,737	\$7,835	\$8,158	\$323	4.1%

- The fiscal 2007 allowance is \$323,043 higher than the 2006 working appropriation. This includes an increase in general funds of \$353,441, an increase in federal funds of \$23,462, and a decrease in reimbursable funds of \$53,500.
- Increases in the allowance are mostly attributable to personnel expenses, which include an 8% increase in salary for all medical examiner positions.

Personnel Data

	<u>FY 05</u> <u>Actual</u>	<u>FY 06</u> <u>Working</u>	<u>FY 07</u> <u>Allowance</u>	<u>FY 06-07</u> <u>Change</u>
Regular Positions	76.00	76.00	76.00	0.00
Contractual FTEs	<u>2.05</u>	<u>6.00</u>	<u>6.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Total Personnel	78.05	82.00	82.00	0.00

Vacancy Data: Regular Positions

Turnover, Excluding New Positions	2.65	3.49%
Positions Vacant as of 12/31/05	4.00	5.26%

- The department must keep 2.65 full-time equivalent positions vacant to meet its budgeted turnover of 3.49%. As of December 31, 2005, 4.0 positions were vacant. One position, an autopsy assistant, was vacant for 18 months. This position is being converted to a computer network specialist and is expected to be filled by February 1, 2006. The rest of the positions were vacant between one to three months.

Note: Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.

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Analysis in Brief

Major Trends

Number of Autopsies Performed Remains Steady: The number of deaths investigated jumped in 2004 and 2005, but the number of autopsies performed remained relatively constant.

Issues

Steps Taken to Retain and Recruit Medical Examiners, but Office Still Faces Problems Retaining Lower-paid Positions: The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner has taken steps to enhance recruitment and retention of medical examiners. However, positions, such as forensic investigator and autopsy assistant, may become more difficult to retain in the future.

Recommended Actions

1. Concur with Governor's allowance.

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Operating Budget Analysis

Program Description

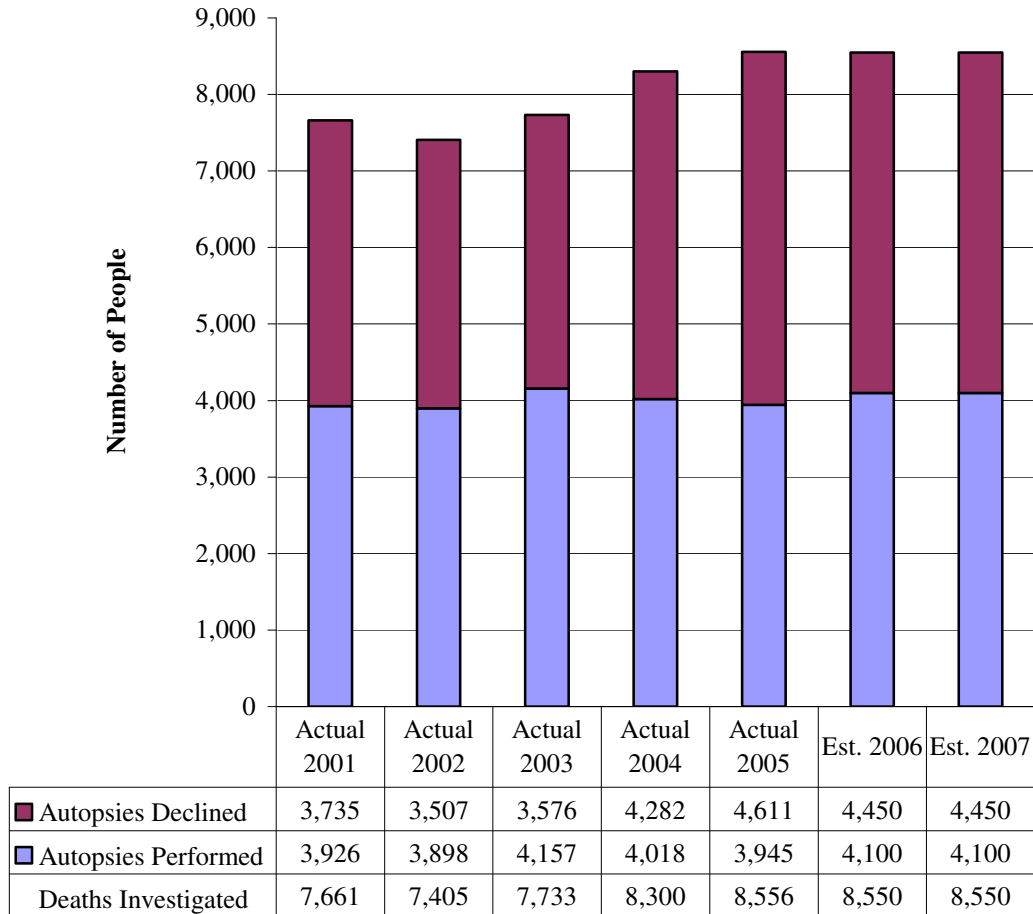
The mission of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is to:

- provide competent, professional, thorough, and objective death investigations in cases mandated by Maryland statute that assist State's Attorneys, courts, law enforcement agencies, and families;
- strengthen partnerships between federal, State, and local governments through training and education of health, legal, and law enforcement professionals;
- support research programs directed at increasing knowledge of the pathology of disease; and
- protect and promote the health of the public by assisting in the development of programs to prevent injury and death.

Performance Analysis: Managing for Results

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner is required to investigate all violent or suspicious deaths, including all deaths unattended by a physician. If the cause of death can not be established during the initial investigation, the pathologist must perform an autopsy on the deceased. **Exhibit 1** shows the number of deaths investigated and the number of autopsies performed since fiscal 2001. The data indicates a trend toward increasing death investigations, reflecting continued population growth. Despite more death investigations, the number of autopsies remains static. The State's autopsy rate continues to be consistent with national averages. In 2005, the State performed an average of one autopsy per 1,343 residents compared to a national average of one autopsy per 1,333 residents, as measured by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME).

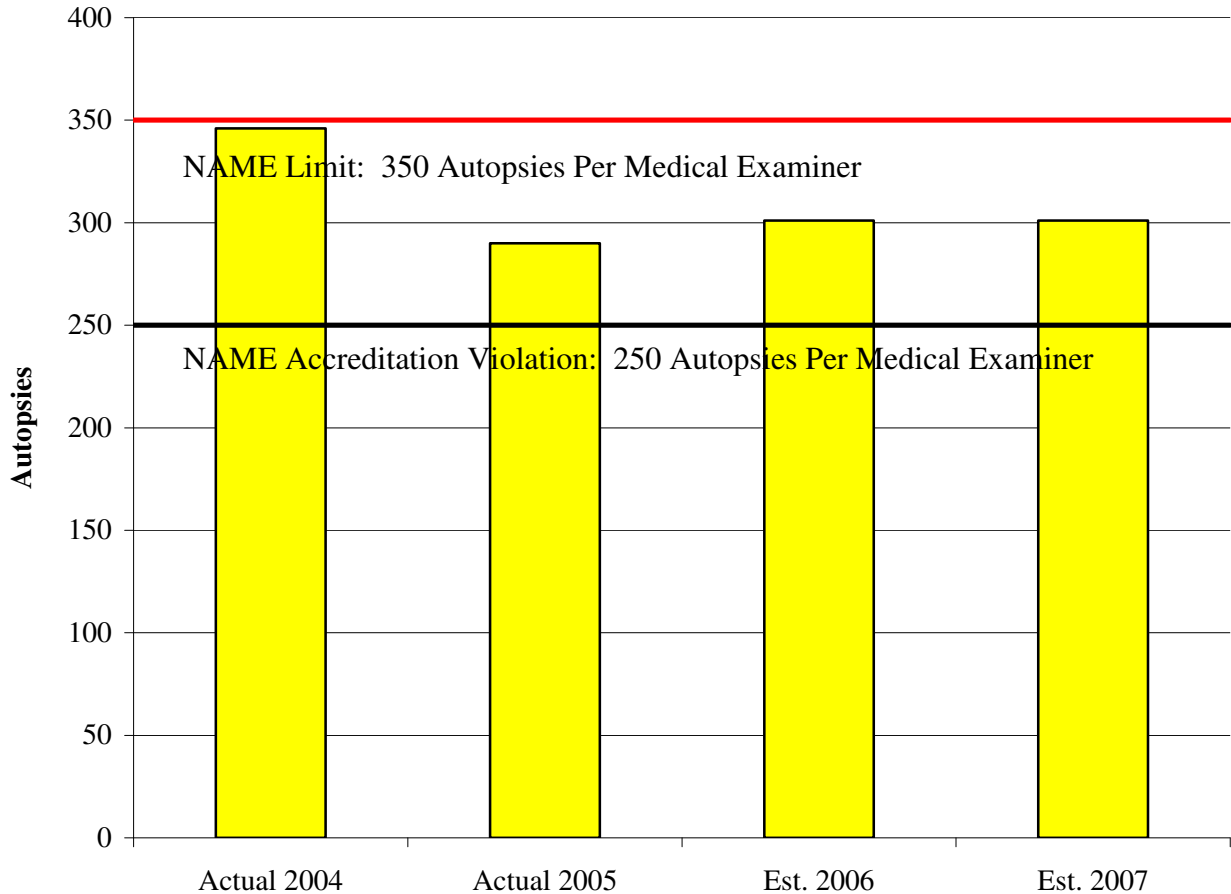
Exhibit 1
Deaths Investigated by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
Fiscal 2001 – 2007



Source: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Exhibit 2 shows performance data for the average number of autopsies per medical examiner. NAME sets an absolute limit of 350 autopsies per examiner to maintain accreditation. In fiscal 1999, the Chief Medical Examiner’s Office began increasing the number of examiners. The result is a decline in the average number of autopsies per examiner.

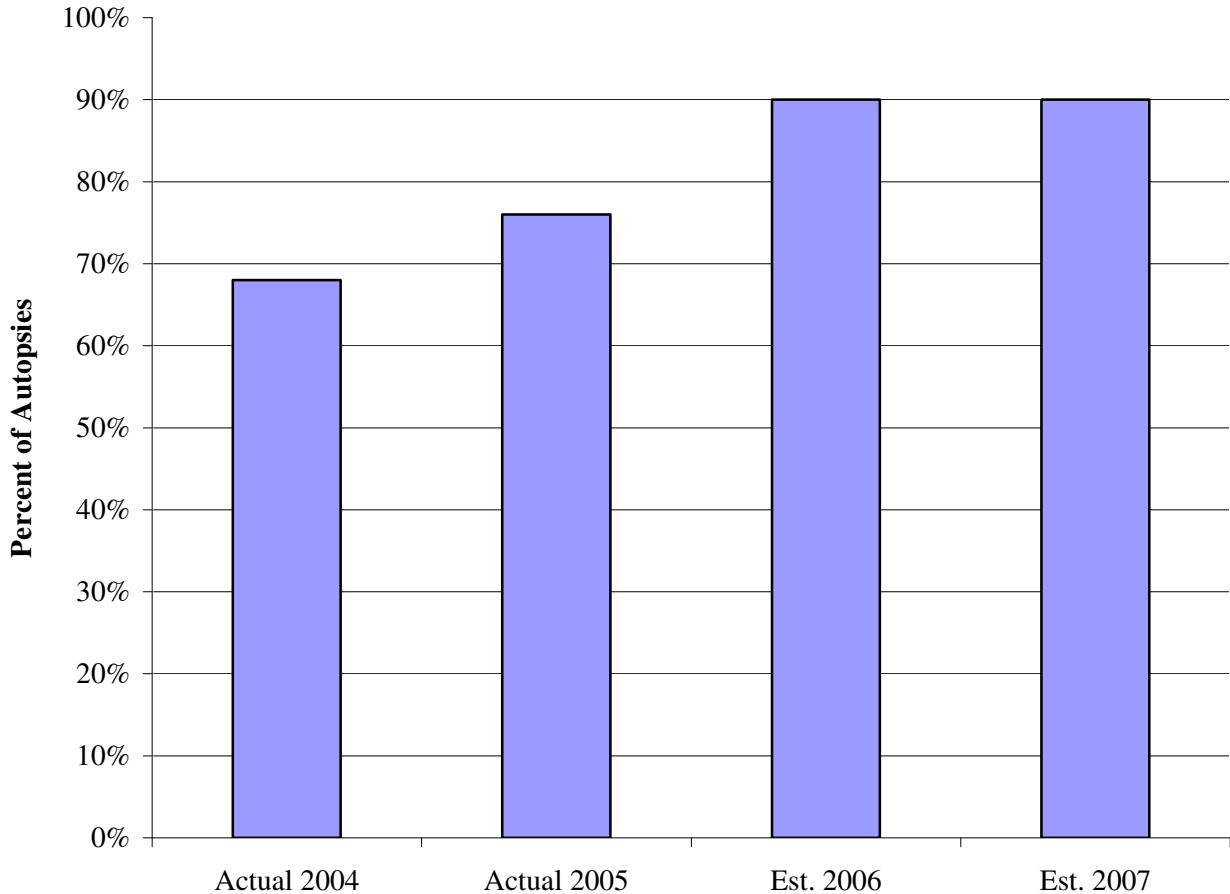
Exhibit 2
Average Number of Autopsies per Medical Examiner
Fiscal 2004 – 2007



Source: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Exhibit 3 shows performance data for the goal of forwarding autopsy reports, when necessary, to the State’s Attorney’s office within 60 working days after an investigation. In 2005, the Chief Medical Examiner reported 76% of autopsy reports within 60 working days. This was an eight percentage point increase over 2004. Much of the improvement may be attributable to flexible work schedules, which allows support staff to work from home one day a week. Working from home gives support staff time to concentrate on writing reports because they are released from public relations duties. The Chief Medical Examiner expects the percentage of reports forwarded within 60 working days to continue to improve.

Exhibit 3
Percent of Autopsies Reported within 60 Days
Fiscal 2004 – 2007



Source: Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

Governor's Proposed Budget

Major changes in the Governor's proposed budget are shown in **Exhibit 4**. The significant changes are associated with personnel expenses. An increase of \$212,958 arises from employee and retiree health insurance. Some of this increase is attributable to underbudgeted amounts in fiscal 2006. Also, all medical examiner positions will receive an 8% salary increase, which increases the allowance by \$166,457. This increase is part of a multi-year plan to help recruitment and retention. The plan gradually increases Medical Examiner salaries to better align with national averages. Operating expenses are expected to decrease by about \$32,000. The total change is an increase of \$323,403.

Exhibit 4
Governor's Proposed Budget
DHMH – Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
(\$ in Thousands)

How Much It Grows:	<u>General</u> <u>Fund</u>	<u>Federal</u> <u>Fund</u>	<u>Reimb.</u> <u>Fund</u>	<u>Total</u>
2006 Working Appropriation	\$7,551	\$156	\$129	\$7,835
2007 Governor's Allowance	<u>7,904</u>	<u>179</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>8,158</u>
Amount Change	\$353	\$23	-\$54	\$323
Percent Change	4.7%	15.1%	-41.6%	4.1%

Where It Goes:

Personnel Expenses

Employee and retiree health insurance including increase to cover under-budgeted amount from fiscal 2006.....	\$213
Eight percent salary increase for all Medical Examiners approved by Post Mortem Examiners Commission.....	166
Increments and other compensation	62
Employee retirement.....	45
Increase in deferred compensation arising from increase in State match.....	8
Turnover budgeted at 3.5%.....	-58
Workers' compensation premium assessment	-80

Operating Expenses

Increase due to medical waste, which was covered by the University of Maryland	29
Increase in medical supplies cost due to increased prices and safety precautions.....	25
Additional cell phones for Medical Examiners to fulfill their role as first responders in cases of mass fatalities.....	6
Office supplies based on 3-year average	6
Decreased telecommunications expenses	-12
Decrease in lease/purchase of lab equipment in two years over three-year financing arrangement	-16
Equipment maintenance, calculated on past three years' actuals, is lower than fiscal 2006 working appropriation	-16
Decrease in funds used to reimburse Deputy Medical Examiners and County Forensic Investigators for services provided outside the Baltimore Metro area	-19
Reduction in cost for medical equipment	-28

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Decrease for software expense and adjustment to more closely align with actual expenditures for project to improve availability of traffic fatality data.....	-54
Other operating expenses.....	-1
Costs Associated with Building Maintenance and Operation	
Increased electricity use.....	19
Building repair arising from aging building, allowance is based on previous three years	16
Increased steam usage	9
Increased sewage use.....	3
Total	\$323

Note: Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.

Issues

1. Steps Taken to Retain and Recruit Medical Examiners, but Office Still Faces Problems Retaining Lower-paid Positions

The office increased medical examiners' salaries by an average of 12% per year over the last two years. This plan was put into place to make Maryland competitive in recruiting and retaining medical examiners. In an average year, only 32 people gain American Board of Pathology certification as forensic pathologists. Of these 32 people, 1/3 never practice, while 1/3 practice part-time. This means only 12 full-time forensic pathologists enter the workforce in an average year.

Similar steps to improve recruitment and retention at lower-paid employment levels have not been taken. While not immediately impacting the office, poor recruitment of lower-paid positions could pose future problems. Strenuous working conditions and unpredictable schedules seem to make the forensic investigator and autopsy assistant positions most at risk for poor recruitment and retention.

- As of December 31, 2005, the office had four vacancies. Two of the vacancies were forensic investigator positions, while two were autopsy assistant positions. One assistant autopsy position was vacant for over 18 months.
- According to the office, 40% of the forensic investigation positions turned over within the past year.
- According to the office, 38% of assigned autopsy assistant positions turned over within the last year.
- An informal survey of salaries, using current job vacancies in other states, yielded an average salary of \$36,680 for forensic investigators and \$31,419 for autopsy assistants. In the Chief Medical Examiner's office, the average salary for forensic investigators is \$31,145, while the average salary for autopsy assistants is \$28,148.

The office should comment on the extent of recruitment and retention problems. Also, the office should discuss plans, if any exist, to deal with possible future recruitment and retention problems and any other outstanding personnel needs.

Recommended Actions

1. Concur with Governor's allowance.

Current and Prior Year Budgets

Current and Prior Year Budgets Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (\$ in Thousands)

	<u>General Fund</u>	<u>Special Fund</u>	<u>Federal Fund</u>	<u>Reimb. Fund</u>	<u>Total</u>
Fiscal 2005					
Legislative Appropriation	\$6,756	\$0	\$131	\$114	\$7,001
Deficiency Appropriation	0	0	0	0	0
Budget Amendments	657	0	106	0	763
Reversions and Cancellations	0	0	-6	-20	-26
Actual Expenditures	\$7,413	\$0	\$230	\$93	\$7,737
Fiscal 2006					
Legislative Appropriation	\$7,484	\$0	\$156	\$128	\$7,768
Budget Amendments	67	0	0	0	67
Working Appropriation	\$7,551	\$0	\$156	\$129	\$7,835

Note: Numbers may not sum to total due to rounding.

Fiscal 2005

Actual expenditures were \$737,000 more than the legislative appropriation. General funds increased by \$657,000. Additional general funds were required to pay for the fiscal 2005 cost-of-living increase, and higher than budgeted salaries, overtime, and health insurance costs combined.

Federal funds increased by \$106,000. This was mainly due to the Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement grant, which was provided by the Department of Justice to purchase new toxicology equipment.

Fiscal 2006

General funds were increased by \$66,420 to recognize the fiscal 2006 cost-of-living adjustment.

Audit Findings

Audit Period for Last Audit:	March 13, 2002– May 17, 2005
Issue Date:	July 2005
Number of Findings:	0
Number of Repeat Findings:	0
% of Repeat Findings:	%
Rating: (if applicable)	n/a

The audit did not disclose any significant deficiencies in the design or operation of the office’s internal control or any significant instances of noncompliance with applicable laws, rules, or regulations.

**Object/Fund Difference Report
DHMH – Office of the Chief Medical Examiner**

<u>Object/Fund</u>	<u>FY05 Actual</u>	<u>FY06 Working Appropriation</u>	<u>FY07 Allowance</u>	<u>FY06 - FY07 Amount Change</u>	<u>Percent Change</u>
Positions					
01 Regular	76.00	76.00	76.00	0	0%
02 Contractual	2.05	6.00	6.00	0	0%
Total Positions	78.05	82.00	82.00	0	0%
Objects					
01 Salaries and Wages	\$ 5,855,782	\$ 5,839,838	\$ 6,194,454	\$ 354,616	6.1%
02 Technical & Spec Fees	311,177	485,673	472,745	-12,928	-2.7%
03 Communication	47,161	55,933	50,046	-5,887	-10.5%
04 Travel	3,110	3,201	3,992	791	24.7%
06 Fuel & Utilities	264,989	235,323	265,203	29,880	12.7%
07 Motor Vehicles	11,874	10,652	12,421	1,769	16.6%
08 Contractual Services	634,398	606,827	578,415	-28,412	-4.7%
09 Supplies & Materials	526,542	479,186	508,417	29,231	6.1%
10 Equip – Replacement	65,290	100,000	55,591	-44,409	-44.4%
11 Equip – Additional	0	4,000	3,500	-500	-12.5%
13 Fixed Charges	11,783	14,150	13,402	-748	-5.3%
14 Land & Structures	4,400	0	0	0	0.0%
Total Objects	\$ 7,736,506	\$ 7,834,783	\$ 8,158,186	\$ 323,403	4.1%
Funds					
01 General Fund	\$ 7,413,406	\$ 7,550,611	\$ 7,904,052	\$ 353,441	4.7%
05 Federal Fund	229,991	155,672	179,134	23,462	15.1%
09 Reimbursable Fund	93,109	128,500	75,000	-53,500	-41.6%
Total Funds	\$ 7,736,506	\$ 7,834,783	\$ 8,158,186	\$ 323,403	4.1%

