


# Theodore LIPSCOMB

Milwaukee County Board Chairman  
County Supervisor, 1st District

To: Milwaukee County Auditor Jerome Heer  
Milwaukee County Comptroller Scott Manske

Date: December 12, 2017

From: Chairman Theodore Lipscomb, Sr. 

Re: Office of Milwaukee County Medical Examiner, Request for Review

CC: Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

We continue to see reports that the growth in drug-related deaths relating to the opioid crisis is straining the resources of the Office of the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner. We all want to ensure that the Medical Examiner has the resources it needs to maintain its national accreditation, as our local Office faces an increased workload due to a national epidemic.

To facilitate a best practices solution that is based in analysis and addresses the concerns raised in a balanced manner that best serves Milwaukee County residents, I asked the Research Division of the Office of the Comptroller in November to respond to some questions I posed about the budget for Office of the Medical Examiner and its contracts with communities outside of Milwaukee County.

Research staff confirmed that the 2018 Adopted Budget appropriates more fiscal resources to the Office of the Medical Examiner than was provided in 2017, noting:

*"The 2018 Adopted Budget provides \$245,604 more than 2017 in ongoing funding for the Medical Examiner's office. Most of the increase is due to the increase in staffing. The 2018 Adopted Budget also allocates a one-time capital expenditure of \$404,000 to purchase a liquid-chromatograph/mass spectrometer (\$200,000), replace five autopsy stations (\$60,000), replace five microscopes (\$130,000), and replace ten autopsy saws (\$14,000)."*

Yet, appropriating additional money to hire more staff may not be sufficient given the Medical Examiner's practical point about shortage of pathologists. Therefore, I also asked Research staff for information about services that the Office of the Medical Examiner provides to Wisconsin Counties outside of Milwaukee County. As I recall, when Milwaukee County started taking on additional work from outside the County, the rationale was that we had excess capacity and could offset our fixed costs with outside revenue.



Research staff replied that we have contracts with Racine and Kenosha, and that we do referrals for Ozaukee and Jefferson. Research staff also relays that the two contracts are up and that services to the others are not provided under contract. As we see a spike in autopsies and our local capacity to respond is in question, timing is ripe for policymakers to determine if it is in the best interest of our residents to provide these services outside of Milwaukee County. A key factor in that decision-making process is whether the rates Milwaukee County charges cover the actual and necessary costs of providing the service, as permitted by statute. A survey of fees across the region also would be in order, as the Department was not able to provide comparables at other offices according to Research staff.

Research staff suggested there are many factors involved that may warrant a deeper look by Audit. Accordingly, I ask that you initiate an Audit review of these questions. Please affirm if you plan to move forward with this recommendation based on my request, or if an action of the full County Board is requested before you proceed. I appreciate your timely response.