



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Whatcom County Council

**THROUGH:** Satpal S. Sidhu, County Executive

**FROM:** Kayla Schott-Bresler, Deputy Executive

**CC:** Dr. Aldo Fusaro, Whatcom County Medical Examiner

**RE:** Ordinance Amending Whatcom County Code Chapter 2.06 to Establish a Medical Examiner Department

**DATE:** November 22, 2024

---

### Background

On May 21, 2024 the Whatcom County Council approved an amendment to the Unrepresented County Employees Resolution, which allowed the County to bring the position of Medical Examiner into County employment. Previously, the role was contracted through outside pathologists.

The Medical Examiner's office sits in the non-departmental program since it has historically been managed via a contract through the Executive's Office. The proposed Ordinance by Councilmember Elenbaas would establish a separate Medical Examiner Department in County code, with the Medical Examiner serving as the official Department Head.

There were some questions at the November 19, 2024 Council meeting about whether the establishment of a Medical Examiner department would increase costs.

The Executive's Office currently processes accounts payable and payroll for the Medical Examiner Office. This has been a new service the Executive's Office has absorbed recently, since this was previously handled by our contractor. Regardless of where this administrative function lies, it requires staff time. As an independent department, the Medical Examiner will need to take on these responsibilities. They are prepared to do so.

The 2025-2026 adopted budget reflects the Administration's best estimate for what it will cost to run a Medical Examiner Office. Its functioning as an independent department

WHATCOM COUNTY  
EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE  
311 Grand Avenue, Suite 108  
Bellingham, WA 98225



**Satpal Singh Sidhu**  
County Executive

does not affect those costs, with the possible exception of the above clerical responsibilities.

That said, this is a new endeavor for the County. The Medical Examiner will do his utmost to stay within budget, but as the office faces accreditation requirements, inflation, and adjustment to a new morgue, it's possible other budget needs may emerge, regardless of whether the Council decides to move ME services into a dedicated department. The Administration and Medical Examiner are committed to keeping the Council informed of those needs

Please contact Kayla Schott-Bresler x 5220 with any questions.