



Satpal Singh Sidhu
Whatcom County Executive



MEMO TO: County Council Members
FROM: Satpal Sidhu, County Executive
Tyler Schroeder, Deputy Executive
DATE: April 26, 2024
SUBJECT: 2024 Unrepresented Resolution Amendment – Medical Examiner

For your consideration, I present an amendment to 2024 Unrepresented Resolution to accomplish the creation of the Medical Examiner as a County unrepresented position.

The 2024 Mid Biennium Adjustments adopted by Council on November 21, 2023 put in motion the approval to bring the Medical Examiner Office into County employment. The adoption of the biennial budget ordinance included the approval of position control for the investigator and administrative positions. The amendment to the Unrepresented Resolution creates the new position of Medical Examiner.

Whatcom County remains one of the only Washington Counties that contracts for this specialized core service. Bringing the Medical Examiner Office into county employment will provide more support, resources and accountability for the office.

The approved budget increase supports a 24/7 office responsible for critical and specialized services and will help to move the office towards accreditation.

Summary of Significant Changes:

- Flat Rate Salary of \$27,500 per month,
- Six weeks' vacation per year, accrued at 20 hours per month, and
- Same health & welfare benefits and retirement as other Unrepresented employees and Elected Officials

Per Whatcom County Charter Section 3.62, the County Medical Examiner shall be appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the majority of the County Council. The Administration requests the Council to continue the appointment of the Medical Examiner and to further secure that appointment by employing the Medical Examiner and staff within Whatcom County government.

The Medical Examiner is responsible for managing the medicolegal death investigation office, performing death investigations, completing autopsies, interpreting toxicology and other laboratory testing results as well as collecting and documenting evidence. These critical services are provided on behalf of Whatcom County and its citizens. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to hire an experienced Medical Examiner at a time when there are so few graduating from universities. Annually there are over 300 vacancies throughout the nation with only 30 Forensic Pathologists / Medical Examiners graduating each year. While there is a national effort to increase those numbers there will be a recruiting deficiency for years to come.

The table below includes comparable counties whether they employ a Coroner or a Medical Examiner and includes the entire respective office budget. Coroner offices have lower wages for the Coroner vs. a Medical Examiner but must contract for the necessary Forensic Pathology services which increases the overall costs of the office. Comparisons below include a 50/50 split between Coroners and Medical Examiners. Medical Examiners are the modern, streamlined approach best suited to meet citizen needs for Counties of our size and larger.

**MEDICAL EXAMINER – CORONER OFFICE
COMPARIBLE COUNTY COST COMPARISON**

| County | ME or Coroner | Employed or Contracted | 2024 Budget | OFM 2023 Pop. | Per Capita | FTEs |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Yakima | Coroner | Employed | \$589,231.00 | 261,200 | \$2.26 | 2 |
| Benton | Coroner | Employed | \$539,572.00 | 215,500 | \$2.50 | 5 |
| Clark | Medical Examiner | Employed | \$2,200,000.00 | 527,400 | \$4.17 | |
| Snohomish | Medical Examiner | Employed | \$4,352,053.00 | 859,800 | 5.06 | 19.65 |
| Whatcom | Medical Examiner | Contracted* | \$1,201,820.00 | 235,800 | \$5.10 | 6 |
| Kitsap | Medical Examiner | Employed | \$1,538,980.00 | 283,200 | \$5.43 | 3 FTE 6.8PT |
| Skagit | Coroner | Employed | \$767,638.00 | 132,000 | \$5.82 | 3 FTE 4 PT |
| Thurston | Coroner | Employed | \$2,019,865.00 | 303,400 | \$6.66 | 7 |
| Pierce | Medical Examiner | Employed | \$7,098,600.00 | 946,300 | \$7.50 | 26 |
| Cowlitz | Coroner | Employed | \$1,187,935.00 | 113,000 | \$10.51 | |

*County Employed pending amended unrepresented resolution

