Powers & Duties of Coroners and Medical Examiners

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Committee on Public Safety & Justice
County of Rock, Wisconsin
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Topics

- Rock County’s Situation.
- Immediate Reforms.
- Long term reforms.
- Considerations.
Recent History

- January 7, 2005 Deputy Coroner’s employment was terminated.
- January 11, 2005 Incumbent Coroner was arrested and charged with:
  - Misconduct in public office,
  - Delivery of prescription drugs,
  - Possession of a prescription drug without a prescription,
  - Theft.
- January 12, 2005 Mutual Aid request made to Dane and eventually to surrounding counties to provide death investigation services.
- January 13, 2005 a retired coroner employee is arrested on similar charges.

Incumbent goes on “medical leave,” but remains in office while Dane County administers the office.

Incumbent resigns as a part of a plea bargain.

The Governor appoints former County Board Chair.

The appointed coroner resigns eight days later.

The Governor appoints another coroner.

To date Rock County paid other counties $48,122 for death investigation services.
**Issues**

- **Independent Constitutional Status**
  - Board’s authority over office limited to the county budget.
  - No standards or qualifications beyond the elective process.
  - Removal or discipline is difficult, lengthy, and expensive.

- **Partisan Politics**
  - Officeholders have party labels and are influenced by the partisan environment.
  - Partisan environment has a more negative effect than positive.

- **Conversion to Medical Examiner**
  - Would only address death investigations after 2006 General Election.

**Short Term Reforms**

- **Give counties true oversight:**
  - Allow board to remove coroners the same way they can already remove (for cause) the county clerk, treasurer, surveyor, or county supervisor.
  - Allow boards to determine policy similar to other administrative county departments.

- **Statewide Reforms:**
  - Create a way to relieve an officeholder from duty while under investigation similar to a sheriff or district attorney.
  - Need uniform standards, qualifications.
  - Allow for regionalization between counties.
  - Non partisan office.
Long Term Reforms

- State Function
  - It no longer makes sense for this to be a local function.
  - Functions of this office would be better administered on a statewide basis.
  - Costs, scope, standards, qualifications should be uniform.

Considerations

- How can we create an environment for people succeed?
- How would we provide this service, if we were to found the state today?
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