

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.

Recent History

- 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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