

Agenda Item Report



Winnebago County
The Wave of the Future

DATE: February 22, 2023
FROM: Medical Examiner Cheryl Brehmer
RE: Budget Amendment

General Description:

Budget amendment to offset the overages from the operational expenses of the Medical Examiner's budget.

Action Requested:

We are asking for the committee's support with rectifying the discrepancy of our 2022 budget.

Procedural Steps:

Committee of Jurisdiction: Personnel and Finance
Action taken: _____

Meeting date: 03/02/2023
Vote: ___5-0___

Committee of Jurisdiction: Judiciary and Public Safety
Action taken: _____

Meeting date: 03/06/2023
Vote: ___5-0___

County Board

Meeting date: 03/21/2023

Background:

While we attempted to utilize each portion of our budget cautiously, the Medical Examiner's Office budget related to operational expenses for 2022 were over by a total of \$65,000. Our largest operational expenses fall under the categories of **Medical and Dental** which includes toxicology and professional services, **Pathology** which includes physical autopsies and expenses related to said autopsies (x-rays, histology, storage over 3 days), and **Transportation**.

While calculating each year for the next year's budget, we can only base our operating expenses off what we have utilized in prior years. These expenses are our best estimate and can fluctuate based on the amount and type of death investigations our office handles. The 2022 budget was calculated in 2021 based on estimating the cases at that time which did not reflect the increase in overdoses that we experienced in November and December of 2021 and this trend continued throughout 2022.

Additionally, circumstances involving the lack of forensic pathologists in Wisconsin created increased demand for the limited pathologist that we do have. With increased autopsy cases, the pathology offices experienced decreased storage capacity leading to a change in their operational procedures, only receiving decedents on the day the autopsy was scheduled. This created a need for storage and increased transportation costs.

Explanation of overages:

53548 Motor Fuel (\$2,655)

In May of 2022, a second county vehicle was received which increased our fuel costs. We also saw a decrease in mileage reimbursement.

55000 Medical and Dental (\$9,291)

The \$22,000 revised budget was based off of toxicology for 45 autopsy cases at \$353 per case (\$15,885), \$1,000 for forensic specialty services (anthropology, odontology, etc.), and a buffer of 13 additional cases or expanded toxicology tests (\$5,115).

\$6,143 was paid out of the 2022 budget for cases that were submitted at the end of 2021 due to the large amount of overdoses. These cases are billed to us after all of the testing is completed not at time of submission.

An additional \$500 was paid for forensic anthropology services which were needed in the identification of skeletal remains.

Free standard toxicology services are offered by the WI State Lab of Hygiene which were normally utilized in non-suspected overdose cases but, due to a 6 to 10 month lag-time on results, other paid services were used in several cases (\$2,648/roughly 7 cases). In many investigations death certificates are not completed until toxicology results are received which can create financial difficulties for families in collecting life insurance.

55010 Pathology (\$25,904)

\$130,000 were the autopsy costs budgeted with an estimate for 88 autopsies to be completed (\$123,200). Also taken into consideration was histology with an average of \$57.10 per case and a buffer of \$1,775 for x-ray costs, possible storage costs after autopsy, and additional diagnostic testing.

\$146,000 was paid for the services of 104 autopsies which created an overage of \$22,800. An unanticipated cost of \$975 was accrued for the rental of an autopsy suite utilized in the identification of the skeletal remains, \$2,129 is a cumulation of additional necessary x-rays and more extensive diagnostic testing on multiple cases.

55026 Transportation (\$25,980)

A budget of \$22,000 was estimated for transportation costs based on the 88 projected autopsies and a buffer of 10 additional removals.

With the inability to have our decedents transported directly from the scene to the pathology office, an additional cost of \$6,325 was created.

Decedents are removed and transported from the scene to a storage facility utilized by our transportation service where they are stored until the date of autopsy. A second transportation cost is

then assessed with the transport from the storage facility to the pathology office for autopsy creating an overage of \$19,655. (Initial transport charge is \$225 - \$275 depending on where in the county the removal is from and second charge is \$100 - \$150 depending on how many cases are transported at a time, 1 versus 2)

Policy Discussion:

The overages in the operational expenses are due to multiple factors including increased autopsy and toxicology cases and lack of storage capacity leading to increased transportation costs and adding storage fees.

The 2023 budget has addressed these issues by increasing the major operational expenses while decreasing other expenses, increasing projected revenue, and staying under the assigned levy. With these changes it is anticipated that we will be able to stay within the assigned budget.

An additional factor that affected the overall 2022 budget includes a revenue reimbursement of \$9,610.50 that was expected from Oshkosh Correctional Institute for autopsy, histology, storage, and transportation charges. These cases are billed once the final autopsy report is received and the death certificates are amended with cause and manner of death. Delays in toxicology reports from the WI State Lab of Hygiene have also delayed our billing process.

Attachments:

Budget Amendment
NMS Documentation
Forensic Anthropology Documentation
OCI Revenue Reimbursement Documentation