

**NEW MEXICO BOARD OF MEDICAL INVESTIGATORS**  
DRAFT MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING- August 16, 2022

NM Office of the Medical Investigator  
The University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center

**BOARD PRESENT:**

<b>David Scrase</b> <i>Board Chair</i>	Acting Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Dept. of Health
<b>Tim Johnson</b> <i>Board Secretary</i>	Chief, New Mexico State Police
<b>Michael Richards</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Interim Dean, UNM School of Medicine
<b>Kent House</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Chair, New Mexico Board of Funeral Services
<b>Lynn Trujillo</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Dept. of Indian Affairs

**ATTENDEES:**

Natalie Adolphi, PhD	Director of the Center for Forensic Imaging, OMI
Amy Atiano	HR Administrator 2, OMI
La Vonda Bowens Woodard	Interim Director of Operations, OMI
Anthony Cervantes	Unit Administrator 1, OMI
Lauren Dvorscak, MD	Assistant Chief Medical Investigator, OMI
Heather Jarrell, MD	Chief Medical Investigator, OMI
Nancy Joste, MD	Professor, Chair, UNM Dept. of Pathology
Rebecca Romans	Senior Operations Manager, OMI
Scot Sauder	Deputy University Counsel, UNM HSC
Kyla Sorensen	Accountant 3, OMI
Douglas Ziedonis, MD	EVP, Health Sciences, CEO, UNM Health System

\*\* This is a preliminary draft of the August 16, 2022, minutes as interpreted by the clerk of the board for use in preparing the official minutes. It is expected that there will be corrections, additions, and/or omissions before the final minutes are reviewed and officially approved by the Board of Medical Investigators.\*\*

1. **CALL TO ORDER AND CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM**

Chairman Scrase called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM and confirmed a quorum.

2. **ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (action item)**

Chief Johnson **MOVED** to adopt the agenda. Dr. Richards **SECONDED**. All were in favor. Motion **CARRIED**.

3. **ELECTION OF BOARD VICE CHAIR (action item)**

Chief Johnson **MOVED** to nominate Dr. Richards. Chairman Scrase **SECONDED**. All were in favor. Motion **CARRIED**.

Chairman Scrase noted for the record that board member officer positions are ex officio positions.

4. **REPORT FROM THE OMI CHIEF (information item)**

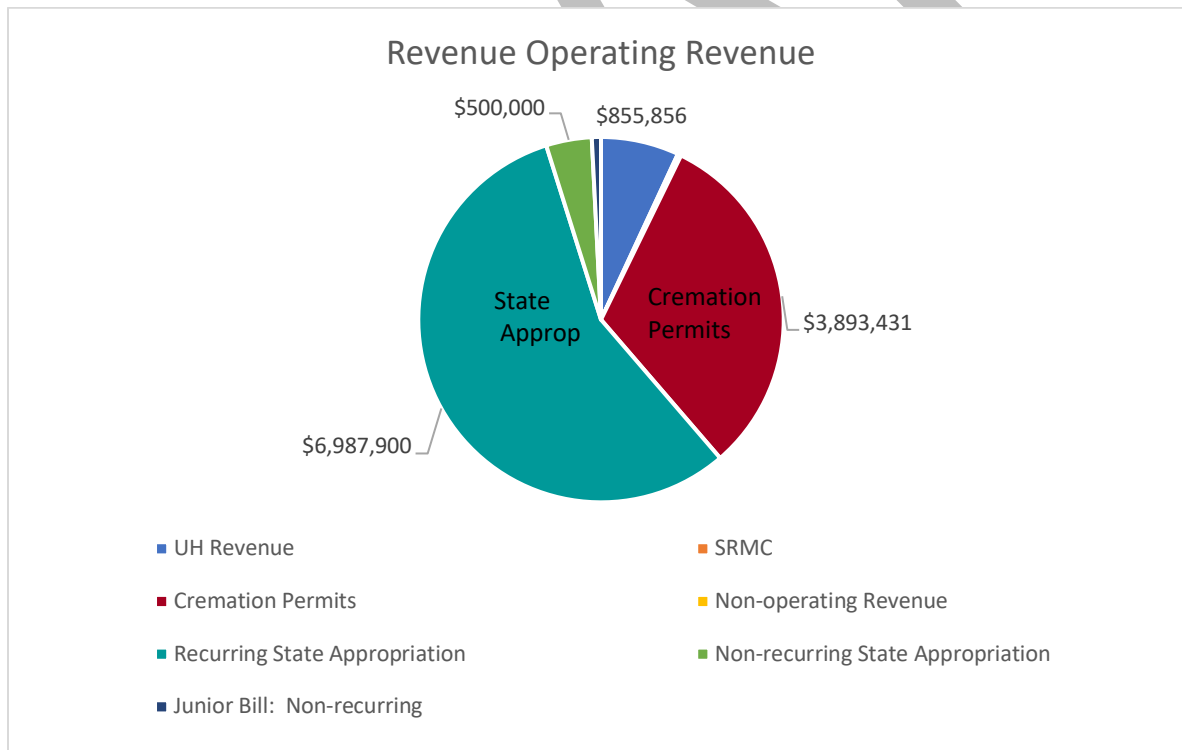
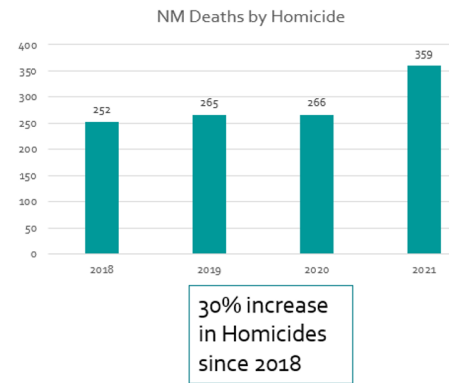
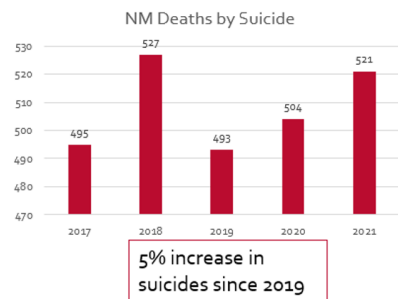
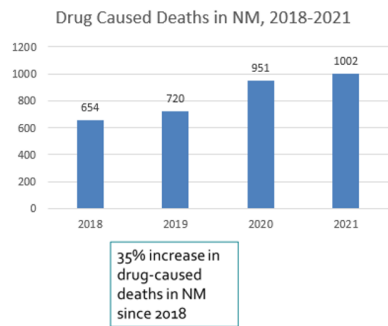
Dr. Jarrell reported that on Thursday, August 11, 2022 she was invited to present to the LHHS committee in Taos, New Mexico. Dr. Jarrell summarized her presentation to the board and presented a PowerPoint presentation.

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Every year 40% of all deaths in New Mexico are reported to OMI. Historically over the past ten years OMI's case load has doubled. However, since 2021 OMI's state appropriations have only increased by 25%

Year	Examinations Performed at the OMI
2019	3,200
2020	3,899
2021	4,584
2022 (Jan to Aug 1)	2,386 (predicted annual volume 3,456)*

\*Still above pre-pandemic volume



**OMI Grief Services Program:**

The OMI Grief Services Program (GPS) has gained recognition nationwide for its exceptional services and is highly sought after by medical examiners offices. OMI GPS services over 4,000 citizens in New Mexico. Under the new leadership of Ms. Danielle Garcia, the OMI is looking to expand services based on the diverse needs across the state. One significant aspect is the betterment of servicing the Spanish-speaking population and to add a child trauma consultant. Last year there were some junior bill appropriations that were specifically for the Grief Services Program.

**OMI Short Staffing:**

Dr. Jarrell presented a slide and highlighted that minimum staffing recommendations were established by a scientific working group, based on benchmark data and populations. It was recommended that a medical examiners office should have a least nine investigators per 1 million people, without taking into account the increased death rate caused by the pandemic. When the pandemic began OMI had thirteen investigators, currently the OMI has fourteen investigators and it was recommended that the agency should have eighteen investigators. Having sufficient staffing of investigators is crucial as forensic pathologists heavily rely on their assistance to gather additional information necessary for determining the cause and manner of death. Insufficient staffing can lead to delays in finalizing reports, which in turn affects the efficiency of OMI operations.

**Dependency on Cremation Permit Revenue:**

One item Dr. Jarrell highlighted in her presentation to the LHHS committee was OMI's dependency on cremation permit revenue. Cremation permits make up about 30% of OMI's revenue. Furthermore, it was noted that OMI's cremation permit revenue ranks amongst the highest in the country, with each permit costing \$230. In contrast, medical examiners in other parts of the United States charge anywhere from nothing to \$50 for a cremation permit.

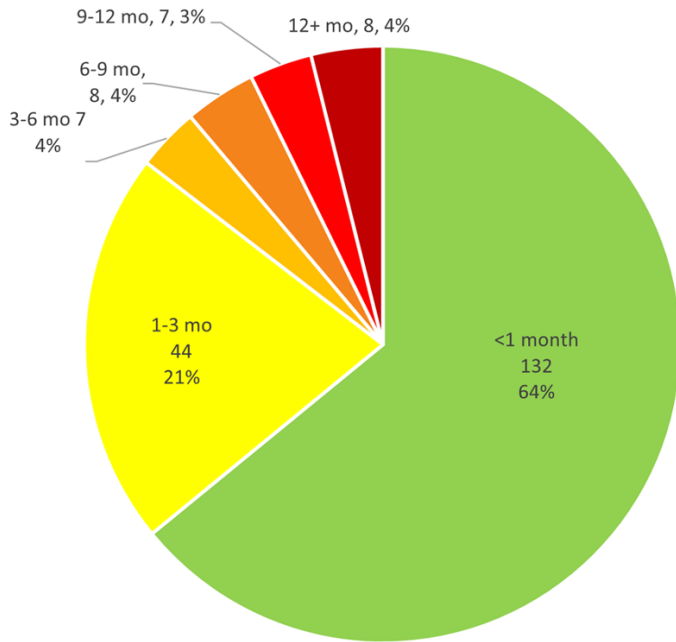
Dr. Richards clarified to the board that, due to the fact that OMI's budget is run through the university budget, it is required to submit a balanced budget. In cases where operational feasibility of attaining a balanced budget is not possible, the School of Medicine has been known to pick up the deficit and underwrite the associated costs. This practice ensures that the OMI remains balanced.

**Decedent Storage:**

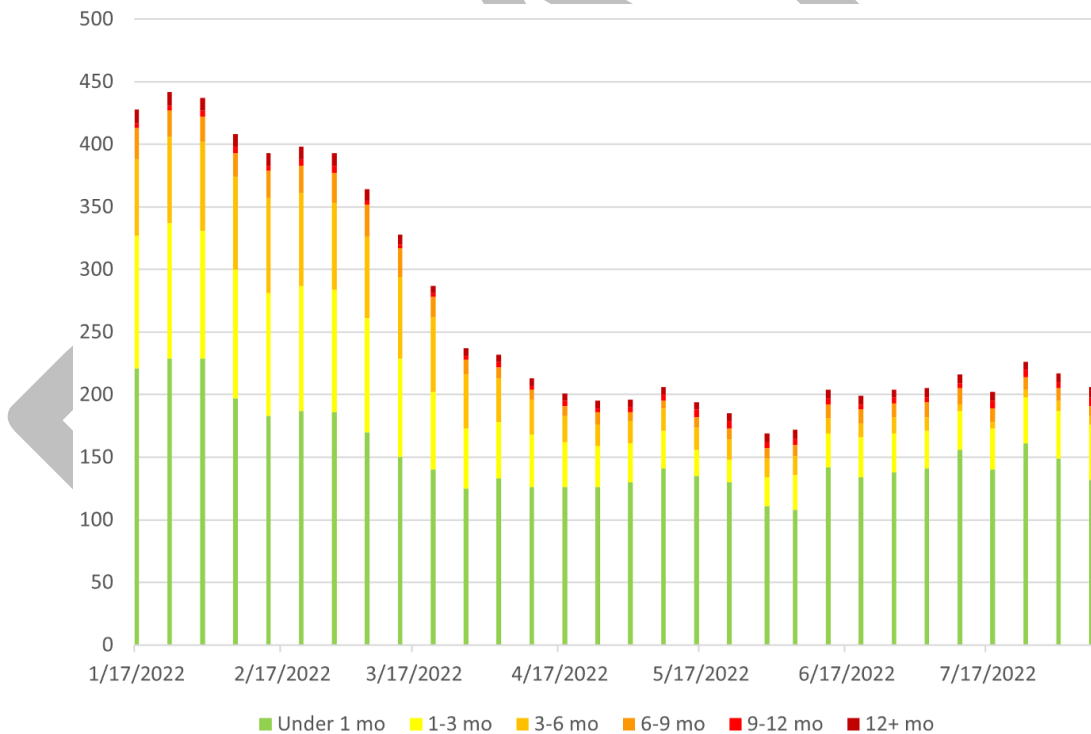
The pandemic brought numerous challenges to the forefront. Shedding light on areas in need of improvement such as updating state statutes and short staffing. Historically and currently NM DOH has worked closely with OMI to bring the decedent storage situation under control. One overarching goal for the past two years has been to eliminate the necessity of housing decedents in refrigerated trucks.

Dr. Jarrell presented a pie chart of decedents in OMI, by time in storage, a snapshot of 8/8/22. 206 total.

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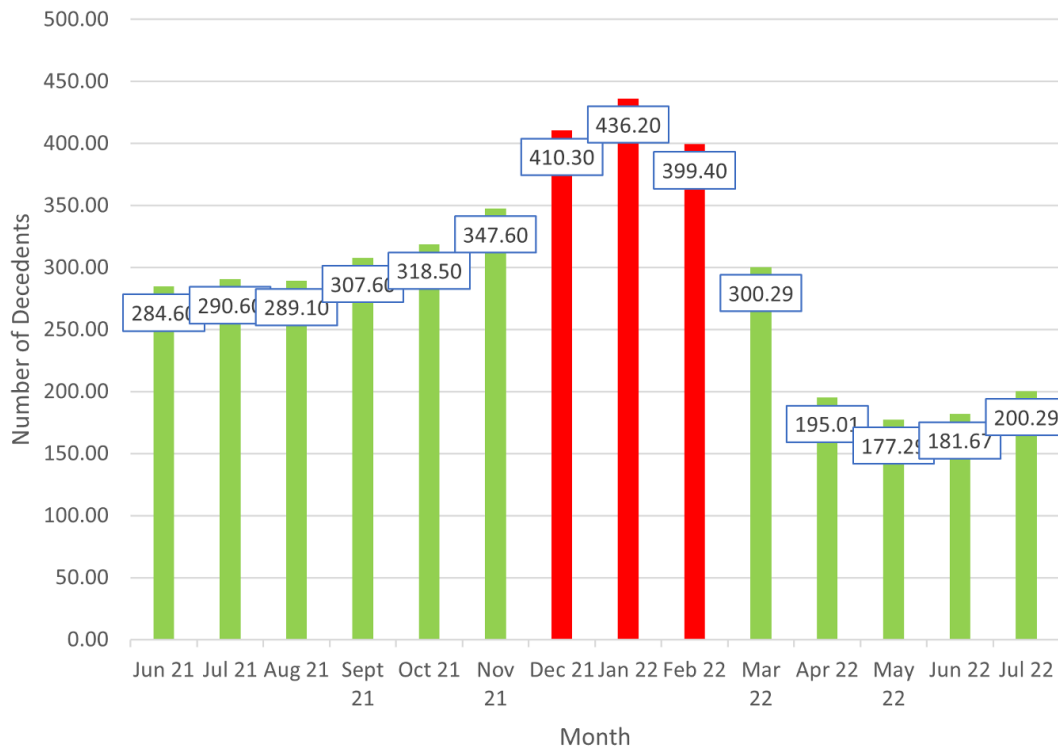


Dr. Jarrell presented a graph of OMI cold storage by time in storage (data snapshot every Monday)



Dr. Jarrell presented a 2<sup>nd</sup> graph and summarized that the OMI has been able to decrease storage capacity, and now has enough reserve that if there was a mass fatality event the OMI would be able to store 47 more decedents if needed.

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Chairman Scrase asked Dr. Jarrell how OMI will keep the storage capacity under control going forward.

The OMI has taken proactive steps to manage the storage capacity and prevent unnecessary strain on the facilities. Steps include.

- Created a dedicated Decedent Affairs department, led by a manager and supported by three staff positions. The primary responsibility of this department is to actively seek out legal next-of-kin in order to facilitate the proper disposition of decedents.
- Actively monitoring current nationwide trends of deaths to better anticipate and plan for any potential increase in storage requirements.
- Actively developing relationships with county leaders and the funeral industry, establishing effective communication channels with these stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of their responsibility to promptly pick up their bodies

### Faculty and Staff Updates:

- 5 forensic pathologist hires in 2 years
    - Emily Helmrich, DO (August 2021)
    - Sophia Rodriguez, MD (August 2021)
    - Daniel Gallegos, MD (July 2022)
    - Aidan Kerr, MD (August 2022)
    - Audra Kerwin, MD (February 2023)
  - Anthropologist (0.5 FTE)
    - Anna Medendorp, PhD (March 2022)
  - Director of Operations
    - Interviews completed June 6<sup>th</sup>, pending completion of hire
- Positions and Progress Contingent on Director Position Appointment
- Supervisor, Technical Services for Field Investigations
  - Restructuring of Field Investigations Department

- Numerous internal infrastructure changes to promote efficiency and effectiveness of OMI mission.

**NAME Inspection:**

National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) is the OMI’s accrediting organization.

- Currently scheduled for first full week in September 2022.
- Based on internal review, OMI could receive a Phase II deficiency based on pathologist caseloads and temporary short staffing of pathologists.

**Desired State Statute Updates:**

- NMSA 24-12-1 (Health and Safety. Disposition of Dead Bodies)
- Highlights from meeting with OMI and NM Association of Counties:
  - Responsibility of legal next-of-kin searches (OMI not adequately staffed to take full responsibility of this role)
  - How long should a family be afforded the opportunity to claim a decedent.

5. **BUDGET (information item)**

Dr. Jarrell opened the budget presentation with a PowerPoint slide illustrating OMI FY23 Income Statement Projection 7/1/22 – 6/20/23.

**OMI FY23 Income Statement Projection 7/1/22 - 6/30/23**

Revenue		
<b>Operating Revenue</b>		
	University Hospital Revenue	\$855,856
	Sandoval Regional MC Revenue	\$38,512
	Other Sales and Services	\$5,013,366
	<b>NYU RECOVER Cohort Autopsy Study</b>	<b>\$129,472</b>
<b>Non-Operating Revenue</b>		
	State Appropriation	\$6,987,900
	State Appropriation: Non-Recurring	\$500,000
	Junior Bill Appropriation: Non-Recurring	\$100,000
<b>Intra University Activities</b>		
	Transfer & Allocation	(\$56,605)
	FEMA Covid-Related Reimbursement	\$95,488
<b>Total Revenue</b>		<b>\$13,663,989</b>
Expenses		
	Salary & Fringe	\$8,985,116
	Body Transportation	\$1,905,085
	Utilities & Plant Maintenance (SLD, Security, Kone Elevator, Pest Control, Repairs & Maintenance)	\$740,210
	Equipment Warranties (Phillips, Siemens, Stryker, C-Scan Technology, Med. Scientific)	\$197,338
	SERVICES (Janitorial, Waste Destruction, Malpractice, Tricore, Invitae, Siemens, etc.)	\$384,215
	Patient Care EXPENSES (PPEs, Body Bags, Formalin, Scalpel Blades, etc.)	\$357,552
	NMS	\$338,000
	Other Expenses (Appr's Overhead, bad debt, FDMIs mileage reimb, VertiQ Maint \$9K, Supplies, phone, Computers, Travel (NAME), Postage, Safety equipments, Banner tax)	\$1,177,223
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>\$14,084,739</b>
<b>FY23 Projected Net</b>		<b>(\$420,750)</b>
<b>FY22 Reserves</b>		<b>\$208,195</b>
		<b>FY23 Overall Projected Net</b>
		<b>(\$212,556)</b>

6. **LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT AND CREMATION PERMIT DISCUSSION (information item)**

Chairman Scrase informed board members that this final informational agenda item had already been addressed in previous discussions during this meeting. The board concurred with this assessment and agreed that no further discussion was necessary.

7. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment

8. **VOTE TO CLOSE THE MEETING AND PROCEED IN CLOSED SESSION**

Chairman Scrase asked for a motion to close the general meeting and proceed in executive session. Chief Johnson **MOVED**. Dr. Richards **SECONDED**.

Mr. Cervantes took role call:

Chief Johnson - Yes

Dr. Richards - Yes

Chairman Scrase - Yes

Sec. Trujillo - Yes

Mr. Houston – Yes

All were in favor. General session closed at 2:14 PM

9. **RE-OPEN THE GENERAL MEETING**

The general meeting re-opened at 2:31 PM. Chairman Scrase certified that only the matters described in the executive session agenda were discussed during close session.

10. **ADJOURNMENT**

Chief Johnson **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. Dr. Richards **SECONDED**. All were in favor. The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 2:31 PM