



## OFFICE OF THE MEDICAL INVESTIGATOR

### NEW MEXICO BOARD OF MEDICAL INVESTIGATORS MINUTES OF GENERAL MEETING – September 30, 2025 \*\* VIRTUAL MEETING\*\*

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

#### **BOARD PRESENT:**

<b>Patricia Finn, MD</b> <i>Chair</i>	Dean, UNM School of Medicine
<b>Gina DeBlassie</b> <i>Vice Chair</i>	Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Dept. of Health
<b>Troy Weisler</b> <i>Board Secretary</i>	Chief, New Mexico State Police
<b>Kent House</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Chair, New Mexico Board of Funeral Services
<b>Josett Monette</b> <i>Board Member</i>	Cabinet Secretary, New Mexico Dept. of Indian Affairs

#### **ATTENDEES:**

Amy Atiano	Associate Director of Operations, OMI
Garon Bodar	Research Scientist III, OMI
La Vonda Bowens Woodard	Director of Operations, OMI
Paul Carbajal	Administrative Assistant 3, OMI
Melissa Doyle	Supv, Technical Services/OMI
Anthony Cervantes	Administrative Officer, OMI
Lauren Dvorscak, MD	Deputy Chief Medical Investigator, OMI
Heather Jarrell, MD	Chief Medical Investigator, OMI
Nancy Joste, MD	Professor, Chair, UNM Dept. of Pathology
Sara Navarrette	Associate University Counsel, UNM HSC
Charlene Perales	Administrative Assistant 3, OMI
Kyla Sorensen	Supervisor, Fiscal Services, OMI

- 1. CALL TO ORDER AND CONFIRMATION OF QUORUM**  
Chair, Patricia Finn called the meeting to order at 1:32 PM and confirmed a quorum.
- 2. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA (action item)**  
Chair Finn asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Chief Weisler **MOVED**. Secretary DeBlassie **SECONDED**. Motion **CARRIED**.
- 3. VOTE TO APPROVE MEETING MINUTES (action item)**
  - March 27, 2025, General Meeting  
Chair Finn asked for a motion to approve the meeting minutes. Chief Weisler **MOVED**. Secretary DeBlassie **SECONDED**. Motion **CARRIED**.
- 4. REPORT FROM THE CHIEF (information item)**  
**State Appropriations Funding Request (RPSP):**  
Dr. Jarrell highlighted the historical funding requests of the OMI, noting that state appropriations were \$5.4 million when she became the interim chief in 2020 and have now increased to approximately \$12.1 million. For fiscal year 27, the OMI is requesting \$4.2 million, which is up from the previous year's request of \$4 million, for which they received \$750,000.



FY27 Request Details	
Four Pathologists' Assistants to manage increased caseload	679,315
Reorganization costs necessary to manage increased caseloads effectively	724,739
Cremation Permit Fee Reduction from \$230 to \$200 per Permit	500,000
NM Court Case Travel: Airfare for Long Distance Travel	-
DNA Testing for Unidentified Human Remains	250,000
NMS Toxicology and Vitreous Testing Lab Fee Increases	250,000
Field Investigator Trainings	80,000
Decedent Transport Cost Increases	500,000
CT Service agreement	160,664
Utilities: Gas, Electricity, Water and Trash	463,600
JNM Administrative Overhead	665,184

FY26 Budget		Minimum Expansion Request (20%)	
	\$	11,811,200	
	\$	2,362,240	
OMI FY27 Expansion Request			
FACULTY	Requested Budget	Notes	
Pathology Assistants	503,196	4FTEs	
Faculty Fringe (35%)	176,119		
<b>Total Faculty Compensation Costs</b>	<b>679,315</b>		
STAFF			
FDM: Shift Supervisor (G. 12)	83,429		
FDM: Shift Supervisor (G. 12)	83,429		
Central: Shift Supervisor (G. 12)	83,429		
Central: Shift Supervisor (G. 12)	83,429		
Radiology Tech (G. 13)	91,978		
Radiology Tech (G. 13)	91,978		
Staff Fringe (40%)	207,068		
<b>Total Staff Compensation Costs</b>	<b>724,739</b>		
OTHER OPERATING COSTS			
Reduce Cremation Permit Revenue	500,000	Need \$500k in order to reduce CP from \$230 to \$200	
NM Court Case Travel: Airfare	-	Removed \$300k request	
DNA Testing	250,000		
NMS Vit Testing Increase	100,000	Expecting the cost of testing to rise from \$15 to \$35 per test	
NMS Tox Testing Increase	150,000	Expecting a 4% rate increase	
FDMI & CO Trainings	80,000		
Body Transport	500,000	Expecting an increase in the number of transports and a potential 4%-7% rate increase; approximately \$2.5 million is needed	
CT Service agreement	160,664		
Utilities: Gas, Electricity, Water and Trash	463,600		
UNM Admin Overhead	665,184	Admin Overhead is about 4.06% of the state funding	
<b>Total Other Operating Costs</b>	<b>2,869,448</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,273,502</b>		

**Key Points of the Funding Request:**

There is a critical shortage of forensic pathologists, and the OMI aims to become more competitive in attracting talent. Two new pathology assistants have been hired, which has positively impacted teaching and case management.

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### Operational Needs:

An audit previously recommended restructuring to address high supervisor-to-staff ratios. The OMI plans to implement mid-level shift supervisors to better manage increasing caseload, which grows by 4-6% annually.

### Cremation Permits:

The OMI generates revenue through cremation permits, which may need adjustment due to high fees. Dr. Jarrell proposed that with state help, the fee for cremation permits could be reduced from \$230 to \$200.

### DNA Testing:

There is a need for state funding to cover DNA testing costs, which can reach up to \$8,000 per case, especially for identifying missing persons and closing cold cases.

### Lab Testing and Field Investigator Training:

Dr. Jarrell discussed the need for funding to cover increased lab fees for vitreous and toxicology testing. A budget for field investigator training is also requested, as training costs have not been previously included.

### Transport and Equipment Costs:

The transport of decedents is a significant expense and expected to rise with fuel costs. Funding is needed for the maintenance of the CT scanner and other equipment, as previous warranties have expired.

### Autopsy Table Project:

Dr. Jarrell expressed gratitude for the funding received for the completion of the autopsy table project, highlighting the improved operational capabilities of the facility.

### Discussion:

Secretary DeBlasie raised questions regarding the field investigators and highlighted the line item on the FY27 Expansion Request slide that allocates \$80,000 for training of field and central office investigators. She asked whether the funding request is intended to address staffing shortages and improve reimbursement rates. Dr. Jarrell clarified that the financial plan does not include increasing reimbursement rates but aims to transition field investigators from contractors to full-time employees, though this would require an additional \$6,000,000. She further clarified that the \$80,000 is intended to cover costs associated with field investigators traveling to the OMI for training.

**Special Appropriations Request:** (OMI special appropriation request for FY27 funding: \$5,677,200)

### Replacement of Surgical Lights & Booms

Dr. Jarrell presented a special appropriation request for the upcoming year, focusing particularly on the need for new surgical lights. The previous appropriation request did not allocate funding for these important items, and the urgency for their replacement has grown. The estimated one-time cost for the surgical lights is approximately \$5,000,000.

Dr. Jarrell emphasized that the current surgical lights are beyond their fixed lifespan, with non-replaceable parts. Furthermore, there are operational issues with the lights on the autopsy tables, which are intended to be movable but currently do not function as needed, causing difficulties during autopsy examinations. The importance of enhanced lighting was highlighted, as it is critical for accurately determining the range of fire in gunshot investigations, especially in low-visibility conditions. Proper lighting is essential for interpreting evidence, such as the presence of soot, which can significantly impact legal outcomes.

- Request: \$4,927,403.88 (One-Time)
- Purpose: Replace obsolete lighting in the autopsy suite

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- Impact:
  - Supports over 1,900 autopsies/year
  - Essential for accurate cause and manner of death determination
  - Enables complex dissections & precise tissue visualization
- Why Now?: Current system is beyond lifecycle and fails modern standards

### HealthRFID Body Management System

Additionally, Dr. Jarrell underscored the necessity of implementing a body management tracking system. The current manual tracking system is outdated and prone to human error, which could lead to the wrongful release of a decedent. Such mistakes could have significant cultural and religious implications, particularly if a body is cremated without the family's consent. The proposed body management system features multiple fail-safes aimed at reducing human error and includes an initial setup cost of \$635,000, with ongoing maintenance costs anticipated in year two.

The tracking system utilizes a scanning process to ensure that only identified and fully examined bodies are released. This system is vital to prevent premature releases before organ returns and the completion of examinations. Dr. Jarrell noted that the facility manages between 200 to 240 decedents on average each day, underscoring the necessity for accurate tracking to ensure operational integrity.

- Request: \$635,595.00 (One-Time), \$114,200.80 (Annual Ongoing Cost Beginning Year 2)
- Purpose: Implement a digital system for tracking decedents and managing chain-of-custody
- Impact:
  - Enables real-time tracking of decedents across coolers and autopsy suite
  - Automates chain-of-custody logs, reducing risk of error
  - Improves operational accuracy and reconciliation speed
  - Supports future tracking of toxicology, histology, DNA, and skeletal remains
  - Strengthens law enforcement coordination and family trust
- Why Now?:
  - OMI currently has no body tracking system in place
  - Manual processes carry high risk of misidentification, wrongful release, or cremation
  - Foundation for future-ready, secure, and accountable operations

### **Statute Changes Regarding Autopsy Photos:**

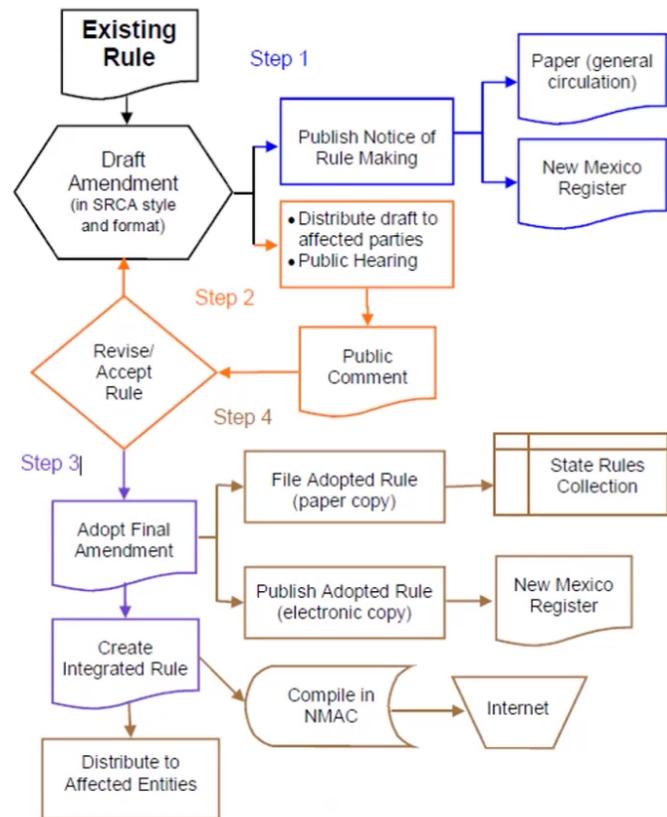
Dr. Jarrell addressed proposed changes to state statutes regarding the public record status of autopsy photographs. The objective is to establish exemptions for OMI autopsy photos similar to those that exist for law enforcement images. Currently, autopsy photos are considered public records, which raises concerns, particularly as they may include sensitive images of children or cases involving significant bodily harm. The goal is to protect the dignity of the deceased and prevent unauthorized dissemination of these images, such as on social media platforms like YouTube. Dr. Jarrell mentioned ongoing discussions with UNM government relations team to strategize the best approach to introduce these legislative changes, focusing on ensuring the appropriate legal sections are addressed.

### SB352 "Certain Photos as Confidential"

- Sponsor: Sen. Katy Duhigg
  - Makes autopsy photos not public record (no effect for law enforcement and judiciary purposes)
- Passed unopposed through Senate Tax, Business & Transportation
- Assigned to Senate Judiciary Committee, went unheard for consideration
- Plan: Reintroduce 2026 Legislative Session

**Intent to repeal and replace NMAC 7.3.2 (Policies of the Office of the Medical Investigator):**

- Written in 1978.
- Out of date with respect to organization
- Positions written in NMAC that do not exist currently
- Ambiguous terminology with respect to positions
- Timeline: One year to draft, in conjunction with OUC
- Statutory Updates, OMI



Dr. Jarrell addressed the next item on the agenda regarding the intent to repeal and replace NMAC 7.3.2, which outlines the Policies of the Office of the Medical Investigator.

Dr. Jarrell began by stating that the current policies, as codified in the administrative code, are extremely outdated. She noted that feedback received during the last inspection by the National Association of Medical Examiners, the accrediting body, indicated that the administrative code has not been updated for many years. She acknowledged that the last five years have been hectic due to the pandemic, but now there is an opportunity to focus on revising the administrative code.

Dr. Jarrell, alongside Ms. Navarette from OUC (Office of University Counsel), conducted a review of potential changes and agreed that the administrative code requires a comprehensive overhaul. The existing code was originally written in 1978 and has seen minimal updates since. She pointed out that the current structure and positions referenced in the code no longer align with the actual organizational structure, leading to confusion about roles, such as the distinction between physicians and investigators.

Dr. Jarrell proposed developing a new administrative code that accurately reflects current practices within the office. Over the next year, She and Ms. Navarette plan to work on rewriting and updating the code, ensuring that it is comprehensive and clear. After drafting the new code, they will present it to the board for approval and subsequently follow the necessary procedures for public comment.

In addition, Dr. Jarrell mentioned that the statutes concerning internal processes also require updates to align with the revised administrative code, specifically regarding the OMI.

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Secretary DeBlasie inquired whether the rules from 1978 would necessitate merely an update of the administrative code rather than the introduction of a bill. Dr. Jarrell confirmed that only an update to the administrative code would be needed but warned that any changes must ensure alignment with existing statutes to prevent conflicts—citing that statutes would take precedence if discrepancies arise.

Ms. Navarette added that as per 14-4-5.7, if definitions conflict between the administrative code and statute, the statute would automatically prevail. Therefore, it would be necessary to address both the administrative code and corresponding statutes to ensure consistency and clarity.

Dr. Jarrell mentioned that while targeting the next legislative session, they have substantial groundwork to cover in the coming year. She indicated that her primary focus for the upcoming session would be securing funding and addressing the state statute regarding autopsy photographs.

Chair of the board Patricia Finn asked specific technical questions regarding the nature of the amendments versus a complete overhaul. Dr. Jarrell clarified that the extent of necessary amendments is so considerable that a repeal and replace approach is more practical than piecemeal corrections.

She concluded by expressing appreciation for Ms. Navarette's partnership in this initiative, emphasizing that this is a significant endeavor aimed at modernizing practices after nearly 50 years.

5. **BUDGET (information item)**

Dr. Jarrell provided a comprehensive overview of the OMI FY26 income statement projections for the period from July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026

<b>OMI FY26 Income Statement Projections 7/1/25 - 6/30/26</b>		
<b>Revenue</b>		
<b>Operating Revenue</b>		
	State Appropriations: Recurring	\$12,152,900
	University Hospital Revenue	\$721,658
	Sandoval Regional MC Revenue	\$50,836
	Cremation Permits	\$3,415,440
	Other Sales and Services	\$1,422,488
	<b>NYU RECOVER Cohort Autopsy Study</b>	<b>\$</b>
<b>Intra University Activities</b>		
	Gains from Sponsored Projects	\$76,031
	Transfer & Allocation	(\$117,078)
	FEMA Covid-Related Reimbursement	-
<b>Total Revenue</b>		<b>\$17,722,275</b>
<b>Expenses</b>		
	Salary & Fringe	\$12,299,488
	Locum Tenens - Forensic Pathologists	\$932,524
	Body Transportation	\$2,039,199
	Utilities & Plant Maintenance (SLD, Security, Kone Elevator, Pest Control, etc....)	\$575,900
	Equipment Warranties (CME annual license, Siemens, CT Scanner mis maintenance, etc....)	\$302,679
	Services (CLEAR database, records storage, PACS, Grief Consult, TriCore, etc....)	\$247,514
	Patient Care Expenses (PPEs, Body Bags, Formalin, etc....)	\$268,025
	NMS	\$140,000
	Other Expenses (Appr's Overhead, travel, FDMIs mileage reimb, Supplies, Banner tax, etc...)	1,586,089.05
<b>Total Expenses</b>		<b>\$18,391,417</b>
<b>FY26 Projected Net Margin</b>		<b>(\$669,142)</b>
<b>FY24 Reserves</b>		<b>\$135,612</b>
<b>FY25 Reserves</b>		<b>\$167,233</b>
<b>FY26 Overall Projected Net Balance: Utilizing Only FY25 Reserves</b>		<b>\$ (501,909)</b>

6. **PUBLIC COMMENT**

No public comment.

7. **ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Finn asked for a **MOTION** to adjourn. Chief Weisler **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. Secretary DeBlassie **SECONDED**. All were in favor. The meeting **ADJOURNED** at 2:14 PM.