

2024 Supplemental Department Questions

Please answer the following questions in a word document and return to Council. The answers to these questions will be provided to council as supplemental information. While not part of the physical budget presentation to Council, departments should be prepared to answer questions Council may have on these supplemental questions. If you feel that you have provided an answer in a previous question, please don't repeat your answer, simply refer to the earlier question/answer.

Strategic Goals

1. Provide your 2024 strategic goals; how are they different from 2023? In what way, if at all, are your strategic changes demonstrated in your budget request?

-Our main goal has not changed. Our office continues to focus on providing the best medico-legal death investigations possible. We plan to continue providing excellent forensic pathology services statewide through our contracted counties.

-New goals for 2024 include having all three pathologist positions filled, resuming contract cases for outside counties, and updating the office space and morgue. These goals are reflected in our budget requests, including our request for new internet cabling, new desks, new carpeting, a new morgue racking system, and installation of new lights in the morgue.

-In 2022, our goals for 2023 included resuming contract cases for outside counties and to purchase a portable x-ray machine. We did resume accepting contract cases from outside counties, that is until recently when our Chief Medical Examiner announced his resignation. Once we have three full-time pathologists hired again, we will resume contracting. We have not yet purchased the portable x-ray, as supplemental grant funds weren't released in a timely manner. However, we intend to purchase the portable x-ray in 2024.

National, state, and local landscape:

1. What are the federal, state, and local issues facing your work? What risks or opportunities does that create for you in 2024 and beyond? What is your plan to leverage the opportunity or mitigate the risk? What support do you need?

The biggest issue our office is facing is the nationwide shortage of forensic pathologists. As our office finds itself once again hiring for pathologists, we will likely struggle to hire for at least one of the pathologist positions. The risk this creates is difficulty hiring pathologists. Being a pathologist

means going to medical school and specializing just like any other doctor, racking up student loans along the way. The difference is that when you specialize and work in pathology, especially forensic pathology, you make a fraction of what your cohort makes. This creates a lack of incentive to even enter the field. Our office continues to host tours and interns to interest young people in the industry.

The support this office will need from the executive's office is an understanding of the severity of this issue and a willingness to assist us as needed in the hiring process.

From a different perspective, the national shortage of forensic pathologists impacts us in that we can choose to offer our services to outside counties, especially coroner counties. At the time of this writing, there is a single forensic pathologist servicing counties in central and eastern Washington who don't have full-time pathologists. One person cannot handle cases for over 16 counties needing assistance. As previously mentioned, once we're fully staffed again, we'll be assisting other counties.

2. What, if any, new mandates do you have impacting your work? Are they funded or unfunded? What is the plan for accomplishing the work?

There are no new mandates that I'm aware of that will be impacting our work aside from HB 1326, which was implemented last year and discussed in 2023's supplemental budget questions. Nothing has changed.

Programs

1. List programs, projects and services within your department funded through federal COVID/ARPA funds. What, if any, of those programs are you recommending ongoing funding for and what is the source of ongoing funding?

None.

2. For programs funded by COVID/ARPA funds, detail the plan to close out and/or transition those programs to an ongoing funding source in 2025 and beyond.

N/A

3. What new programs are you launching for 2024? What need or efficiency is that new program addressing? How is that program funded for sustainability? What metrics are in place to determine effectiveness?

None.

4. If different than #3, what are your areas of significant investment? What are you not doing because of that investment?

Areas of significant investment for the Medical Examiner's Office in 2024 include office and morgue updates, such as a new racking system and new desks.

Internal Operations

1. What is your department doing to streamline processes or deliver services in a new way? How do your budget allocation requests play into these innovations? Are there ways which a different budget approach, e.g. several departments sharing a resource, could achieve the same or better results in a more cost-effective way?

We'll be once again offering pathology services to outside counties. The revenue earned from this goes straight into the general budget, so we don't see that money directly, though we do all the work to bring the money in. We also intend to begin offering neuropathology consults, which will generate approximately \$1,500.00 per case. That money will also go directly to the general fund, not our department. Our request for a new racking system will assist with the extra bodies we store temporarily from outside counties.

2. What, if any, hiring challenges are you experiencing? How is that affecting your level of service or internal operations? How are you mitigating those operational challenges and/or what is your plan for recruitment?

As previously mentioned, we will likely struggle to hire for a pathologist. At the time of this writing, there is a possibility that the new chief will be one of our current associate medical examiners. If that happens, we will have a vacant associate medical examiner position, which has proved difficult to hire for in the past. Luckily, we were able to raise the salary for the position last year, and we're hopeful that the increased salary will create some applicants. We are mitigating the challenge of hiring by networking. Every person in the office who has connections to a forensic pathologist is reaching out advertise the opening we have.

The effect of this challenge in hiring is that we can do less cases per day and cannot contract with most of the outside counties until we're fully staffed again. Even if the doctors we do have wanted to work 14 hour days, they would quickly exceed the N.A.M.E. maximum number of autopsies performed per doctor. Exceeding this maximum would threaten the

accreditation we have, which is now mandated by HB1326 if want maximum reimbursement from the state.

3. To help inform Council on experiences around hiring and retention, please provide a list of all vacant position titles, position codes, FTE amount (1.0, 0.5, etc.), date vacated, and date first posted. Template spreadsheet attached for convenience and conformity; if already tracking information in another format, that is acceptable as well. Please list each vacancy separately.

Currently, there are not technically any vacancies. As of October 15th, we will have the following vacancy:

Position Title: Chief Medical Examiner

Position Code: MED2470R

FTE amount: 1.0

Date Vacated: October 15th, 2023

Date first posted: August 28th, 2023

In the event that the new chief is one of our current associate medical examiner's, then on October 15th, 2023, we *might* have the following vacancy:

Position Title: Associate Medical Examiner

Position Code: MED2472R

FTE amount: 1.0

Date vacated: October 15th, 2023

Date first posted: TBD

4. What effect has the increase of inflation and/or supply chain issues had on your department? What, if any, services, or projects have you had to adjust to accommodate for this? (i.e. moving to outside contracted services, delaying of project starts and/or purchasing, redistribution of workload, etc.)

Supply chain issues have disrupted our plan to get new desks for our doctors. Inflation has impacted our department in that the price of supplies has increased greatly, leading us to request increases in supplies DACs. Not that we were wasteful previously, but because of increased prices we are extra careful about what and how we're using supplies.

5. When was the last time your department implemented a fee increase? Do you have any plans to increase fees?

We increased contracting fees for outside counties this year. We have no plans to increase other fees at this time.

6. Do you have any plans to do a rate/fee study? Are your current fees established based on a full cost recovery model?

No plans to do a study. Our current fees are based solely on trying to recover costs and not to profit.

Successes

1. Take this opportunity to share one significant success in your department over this past year. What made it a success?

Our biggest success this year is successfully onboarding two new associate medical examiners. They're so great that although our chief is leaving, we're entirely confident in our associate medical examiners to uphold the standards set by our chief.