

STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DEVDDUTTA SANGVAI
SECRETARY

July 14, 2025

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Mr. Brian Matteson, Director
Fiscal Research Division
Suite 619, Legislative Office Building
Raleigh, NC 27603-5925

Dear Director Matteson:

Session Law 2023-134, Section 9H.8.(g) requires the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to submit an annual report on the autopsy centers and regional autopsy centers within the North Carolina medical examiner system. This report is due to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Fiscal Research Division. Pursuant to the provisions of law, the Department is pleased to submit the attached report.

Should you have any questions regarding this report, please contact Karen Wade, Director of Policy, at Karen.Wade@dhhs.nc.gov.

Sincerely,

Signed by:

Debra Farrington for Devdutta Sangvai
45507E3ADBA8489....
Devdutta Sangvai
Secretary

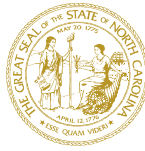
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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

JOSH STEIN
GOVERNOR

DEVPUTTA SANGVAI
SECRETARY

July 14, 2025

SENT VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

The Honorable Donny Lambeth, Chair
Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on
Health and Human Services
North Carolina General Assembly
Room 303, Legislative Office Building
Raleigh, NC 27603

The Honorable Carla Cunningham, Chair
Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on
Health and Human Services
North Carolina General Assembly
Room 402, Legislative Office Building
Raleigh, NC 27603

The Honorable Larry Potts, Chair
Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on
Health and Human Services
North Carolina General Assembly
Room 307B1, Legislative Office Building
Raleigh, NC 27603

Dear Chairmen:

Session Law 2023-134, Section 9H.8.(g) requires the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to submit an annual report on the autopsy centers and regional autopsy centers within the North Carolina medical examiner system. This report is due to the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services and the Fiscal Research Division. Pursuant to the provisions of law, the Department is pleased to submit the attached report.

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY / AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

Annual Autopsy Centers Report
Session Law 2023-134, Section 9H.8.(g)



Report to the
Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on
Health and Human Services

and

Fiscal Research Division

By

North Carolina Department of Health and Human
Services

July 14, 2025

BACKGROUND

The North Carolina General Assembly passed the Statewide Medical Examiner Act of 1967 to provide a statewide system for postmortem medicolegal examinations. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) was established in 1968, and the first Chief Medical Examiner was appointed. The OCME is responsible for overseeing the operations of the entire medical examiner system in North Carolina and is assisted in that effort by five (5) regional autopsy centers and another four (4) hospital-based pathology practices that are contracted to perform autopsies for the medical examiner system.

Session Law 2023-134, Section 9H.8.(g) requires the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner to submit an annual report each February 1st on the autopsy centers and regional autopsy centers within the North Carolina medical examiner system. The report shall include at least all of the following information:

- (1) The total number of death investigations, toxicology screenings, and autopsies performed by each autopsy center and regional autopsy center within the medical examiner system.
- (2) Of the number specified in subdivision (1) of this subsection, the total number of autopsies performed as a result of the district attorney of the county asserting to the Chief Medical Examiner or the medical examiner of the county in which the body was located that there was probable cause to believe that a violation of G.S. 14-18.4 had occurred.
- (3) The total number of outstanding autopsies and autopsy reports that need to be completed at each autopsy center and regional autopsy center on the date of the report, and, for each outstanding autopsy, the date on which the case commenced and whether the case involves a suspected violation of G.S. 14-18.4.
- (4) Beginning with the report due on February 1, 2025, an analysis of the autopsy fee established by subsection (a1) of G.S. 130A-389, as amended by this act, which shall include at least all of the following:
 - a. The results of the analysis and any recommended changes to the fee or how the fee is apportioned between the State and counties.
 - b. The total amount of fees paid to each autopsy center and regional autopsy center within the North Carolina medical examiner system.

Data are provisional and subject to change as cases continue to be finalized and reported. Data on cases from January 2025 and later are not included as they were not available at the time of data query for the submission of this report.

Limitations of current data systems.

We are in the process of implementing a new information technology system which will enable OCME to better track and report data on medical examiner cases. Our existing manual tracking system was used to develop this annual report.

About the Medical Examiner System in North Carolina

Jurisdictional Authority

There are approximately 110,000 annual deaths in North Carolina, but fewer than 15% are referred to the medical examiner system. Pursuant to NCGS § 130A-383, the following deaths are investigated by the medical examiner system:

- Any death resulting from violence, poisoning, accident, suicide, or homicide.
- Sudden deaths when the deceased had been in apparent good health or when unattended by a physician.
- Deaths occurring in a jail, prison, correctional institution, or in police custody.
- Deaths occurring in State facilities operated in accordance with Part 5 of Article 4 of Chapter 122C of the General Statutes.
- Deaths occurring pursuant to Article 19 of Chapter 15 of the General Statutes.
- Deaths occurring under suspicious, unusual, or unnatural circumstances.

There are approximately 340 county medical examiners across North Carolina, at least two in each county – all of which are appointed by NC’s Chief Medical Examiner. All county medical examiners have some type of medical or death investigation background. The appointment for local medical examiners is for three (3) years, and initial training and continuing education are required. Once the medical examiner has determined that a death falls under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner system, the medical examiner may perform an external examination on the body, collect specimens for toxicological testing, and is responsible for providing an investigation report to the OCME and assisting in certifying the cause and manner of death on the death certificate.

The medical examiner determines whether the body requires an autopsy based on the investigation and OCME guidelines and statutes. Such cases will receive both external and internal examinations at facilities staffed by forensic or anatomic pathologists. Including the OCME Raleigh office, there are five Regional Autopsy Centers (RACs), which are staffed by American Board of Pathology-certified forensic anatomic pathologists, and four hospital-based Autopsy Centers, which are staffed by American Board of Pathology-certified anatomic pathologists.

The five Regional Autopsy Centers in the state include the OCME in Raleigh (a state agency), which does one-third of all medicolegal autopsies in the system. The other four are contracted entities in Greenville, staffed by the East Carolina University (ECU) at Brody School of Medicine; Winston-Salem, staffed by Wake Forest University Health Services (WFUHS); Charlotte, staffed by County of Mecklenburg Medical Examiner’s Office (Meck) and the newly created South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County that opened December 17, 2024. The four, hospital-based Autopsy Centers, which are also under contract, are located at: Coastal Pathology Associates at Onslow Memorial Hospital in Jacksonville; Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD. at Sampson Regional Medical Center in Clinton; Southeastern Pathology Associates in Lumberton; and Mountain Pathology Services at Harris Regional Hospital in Sylva.

OCME is located in Raleigh and serves as the central administrative office of NC’s medical examiner system to provide oversight for the statewide ME system. OCME is the only

component of the system operated by the State of North Carolina. In addition to serving as a Regional Autopsy Center, OCME includes a forensic toxicology laboratory accredited by the American Board of Forensic Toxicology that provides toxicology testing for the entire ME system.

AUTOPSY FACILITIES AND DESIGNATED COUNTIES

Facility	Counties Served
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME)	(33) Alamance, **Anson, Bladen, **Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Columbus, Cumberland, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Guilford, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Orange, Person, Randolph, Richmond, *Robeson, Rockingham, Rowan, *Sampson, Scotland, Stanly, **Union, Vance, Wake, Warren, Wayne
†Southeastern Pathology Associates	*Robeson
†Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD	*Sampson
East Carolina University	(31) Beaufort, Bertie, Brunswick, Camden, *Carteret, Chowan, *Craven, Currituck, Dare, *Duplin, Edgecombe, Gates, Greene, Halifax, Hertford, Hyde, *Jones, Lenoir, Martin, Nash, *New Hanover, Northampton, *Onslow, *Pamlico, Pasquotank, *Pender, Perquimans, Pitt, Tyrrell, Washington, Wilson
Coastal Pathology Associates	(7) *Carteret, *Craven, *Duplin, *Jones, *Onslow, *Pamlico, *Pender) *
Wake Forest University Health Services	(33) Alexander, Allegheny, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Burke, Caldwell, ***Catawba, *Cherokee, *Clay, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, *Graham, *Haywood, Henderson, Iredell, *Jackson, Lincoln, Madison, McDowell, *Macon, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Stokes, Surry, *Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin, Yancey
County of Mecklenburg	(3) Cleveland, Gaston, Mecklenburg
Mountain Pathology Services	(7) *Cherokee, *Clay, *Graham, *Haywood, *Jackson, *Macon, *Swain
****South Piedmont	(1) Union

Note: * County designations may overlap with multiple regional facilities.

** Absorbed by OCME in 2022 without additional resources when autopsy center eliminated coverage.

*** Absorbed by WFUHS in 2021 when autopsy center stopped providing ME/Autopsy services.

****South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County opened December 17, 2024, and will be included in the 2025 data set.

†Dr. Barr and Southeastern Pathology Associates services overlap with OCME. Dr. Barr, Jr., MD and Southeastern Pathology Associates perform approximately 7.0% of the autopsy examinations in OCME-covered areas.

2024 MEDICAL EXAMINER CASES

In 2024, 105,777 people were reported to have died in North Carolina and 17,203 of these deaths were referred to the ME system. Of these reported deaths, 14,625 were accepted as jurisdictional cases and investigated by the ME system. At the time of this report, 11,679 (80%) of medical examiner cases have a death certificate containing final cause and manner of death, a 6% improvement from 2023.

Note: Pending refers to deaths when determination of cause and manner of death depends on further information (Centers for Disease Control). All case counts exclude assessment for non-human remains, historical remains, fetal deaths, those that are not yet identified, delayed examinations where death occurred prior to 2024 (e.g. exhumations), and deaths occurring outside North Carolina. In addition, death certificate data includes only those cases that have been reported to the state as of January 13, 2025, when the query was processed.

Hence, deaths that occurred during recent months may have not yet been reported. During the NC ME System response to Hurricane Helene, some workload shifts were made between Wake Forest University Health Services, OCME, and County of Mecklenburg. These shifts are not accounted for in the death certificate-based data.

Table 1. Overview of Deaths Reported and Jurisdictional Dispositions, 2024[†]

	<i>OCME Jurisdiction*</i>	<i>NC Medical Examiner System</i>
<i>Total Deaths</i>	45,360	105,777
<i>Deaths Referred to ME</i>	7,517	17,203
<i>Cases Not ME-Eligible</i>	1,076 (14%)	2,350 (14%)
<i>Deaths Investigated by ME</i>	6,340 (84%)	14,625 (85%)
<i>Deaths Certified by ME</i>	5,986	13,760
<i>Autopsies</i>	1,478	4,149
<i>Cases with Toxicology Performed</i>	5,674 (95%)	12,489 (91%)
<i>External and Supplemental Examinations</i>	1,863	N/A
<i>Completed Death Certificates (non-pending)</i>	4,612 (73%)	11,679 (80%)
<i>Pending Death Certificates on Autopsies</i>	699	1,458

Note: *OCME jurisdiction: deaths investigated by ME system in the 33 counties OCME serves and autopsies performed at OCME (see Technical Notes), including Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD and Southeastern Pathology Associates because services overlap with OCME.

[†]2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change. OCME does not perform partial autopsies or hospital autopsies.

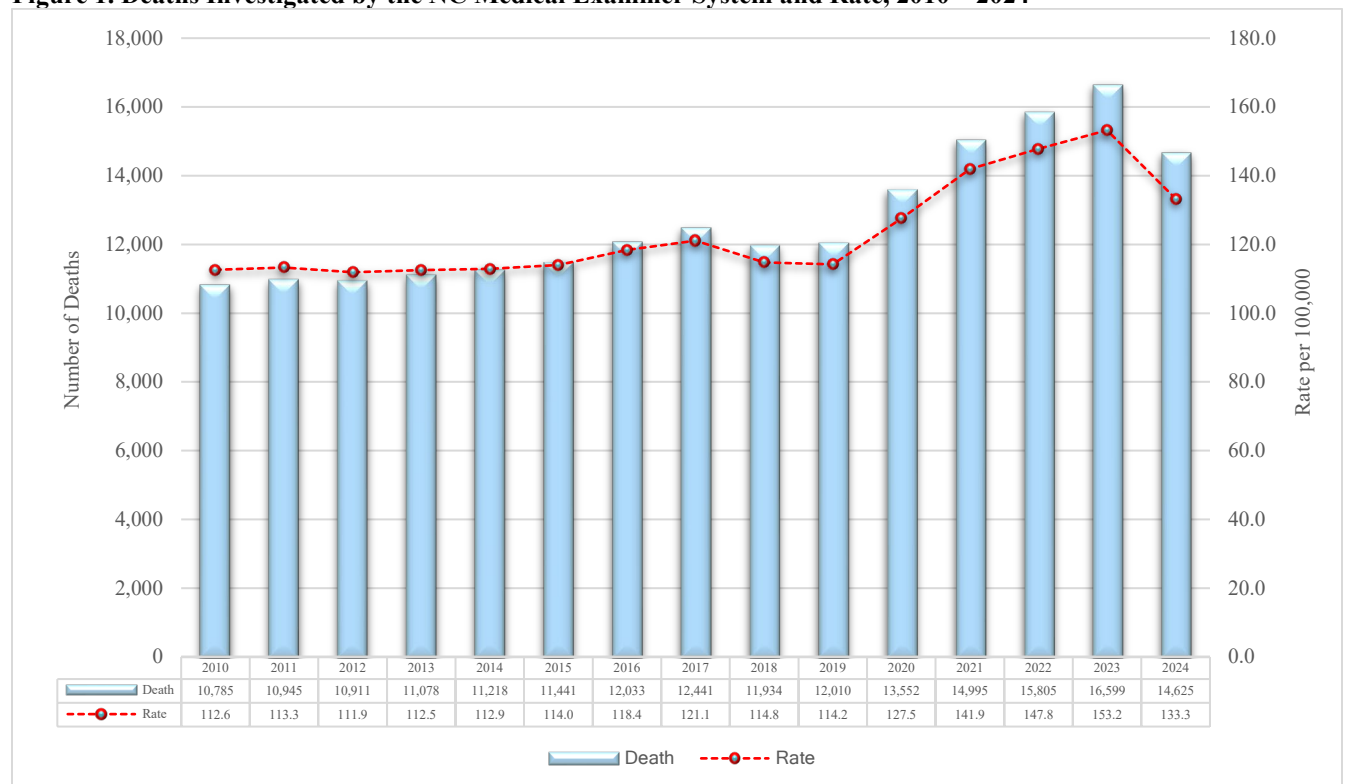
TOTAL DEATHS AND AUTOPSIES

Deaths Investigated by the Medical Examiner System

A total of 14,625 deaths were investigated by the ME system in 2024.

Death investigation data for cases processed by Regional Autopsy Centers and Autopsy Centers are not available in current information technology systems; however, we will be able to track and report these data after the successful system wide launch of our new information technology system.

Figure 1. Deaths Investigated by the NC Medical Examiner System and Rate, 2010 – 2024[†]



Note: Rates per 100,000 NC residents.

[†] 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

Autopsies Performed at Autopsy Centers

The ME system performed 4,149 autopsies in 2024. OCME performed the largest number of autopsies (36%), followed by Wake Forest University Health Services (23%), County of Mecklenburg (16%) and East Carolina University (15%).

Table 2. Autopsies Performed at Autopsy Centers, 2024[†]

Type of Centers	Autopsy Centers & RACs	Number of Autopsies Performed
Regional Autopsy Center	East Carolina University	633
Regional Autopsy Center	County of Mecklenburg	655
Regional Autopsy Center	Office of the Chief Medical Examiner* Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD Southeastern Pathology Associates	1,478
Regional Autopsy Center	Wake Forest University Health Services	959
Regional Autopsy Center	South Piedmont**	0
Other Providers	Mountain Pathology Services	116
Other Providers	Coastal Pathology Associates	307
Other Providers	Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD	-
Other Providers	Southeastern Pathology Associates	-
	TOTAL	4,149

Note: *Data reported for OCME includes Dr. Barr and Southeastern Pathology Associates because services overlap with OCME Autopsies per autopsy center are estimates as they are based on the autopsy facility primary county coverage, which does not account for back-up coverage by another autopsy facility. Dr. Barr, Jr., MD and Southeastern Pathology Associates perform approximately 7.0% of the autopsy examinations in OCME-covered areas.

**South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County opened December 17, 2024, and will be included in the 2025 data set.

[†] 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

TOXICOLOGY TESTING

A total of at least 12,489 or 91% of medical examiner jurisdictional cases in 2024 had toxicology testing. Of medical examiner jurisdictional cases that had toxicology testing, OCME has the largest number of cases with toxicology testing (45.4%), followed by Wake Forest University Health Services (21.1%), and East Carolina University (14.4%).

Note: Toxicology testing data is provisional and an underestimation as it does not include cases that were in process at the time of data query and have not yet issued an initial result.

Toxicology testing consists of toxicological or other chemical tests performed upon tissue or body fluid(s) from a decedent. Substances tested may include toxins, alcohol, drugs of abuse, prescription drugs, their metabolites, or clinical chemistries. Toxicology testing numbers do not account for multiple tests performed on one case. The OCME Toxicology Laboratory performs more than 36,000 analytical tests each year.

Table 3. Toxicology Testing Performed by Autopsy Centers, 2024[†]

Type of Centers	Autopsy Centers & RACs	Cases - Toxicology Testing Performed
Regional Autopsy Center	East Carolina University	1,794
Regional Autopsy Center	County of Mecklenburg	1,616
Regional Autopsy Center	Office of the Chief Medical Examiner* Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD Southeastern Pathology Associates	5,674
Regional Autopsy Center	Wake Forest University Health Services	2,637
Regional Autopsy Center	South Piedmont**	-
Other Providers	Mountain Pathology Services	251
Other Providers	Coastal Pathology Associates	513
Other Providers	Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD	-
Other Providers	Southeastern Pathology Associates	-
	County Not Assigned	4
	TOTAL	12,489

Note: *Data reported for OCME includes Dr. Barr and Southeastern Pathology Associates because services overlap with OCME.

Toxicology screenings per autopsy center are estimates as they are based on autopsy facility primary county coverage, which does not account for back-up coverage by another autopsy facility.

County Not Assigned: Not all data was complete at query date for toxicology testing performed. This designation is for those cases where toxicology testing county was not yet identified

**South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County opened December 17, 2024, and will be included in the 2025 data set.

[†] 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

DEATH BY DISTRIBUTION (G.S. 14-18.4)

District Attorney Authorized Death by Distribution Autopsies

Note: Suspected drug overdose and fentanyl positive cases reflect the most recent available data at the time of data query for this report (<https://injuryfreenc.dph.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/overdose.htm>).

Coinciding with the effective date for revisions to NCGS §14-18.4, tracking was implemented December 1, 2023, for the number of autopsies performed where the District Attorney of the county asserting to the Chief Medical Examiner (or the ME of the county in which the decedent was located) that there was probable cause to believe that a violation of G.S. 14-18.4 had occurred. For individuals who died in January to December 2024, we received **229** autopsy requests from District Attorneys to authorize autopsies in these circumstances. The exams were conducted at the following autopsy facilities: OCME -150 (67%); Wake Forest University Health Services -28 (12%); Coastal Pathology Associates -21 (9%); East Carolina University -20 (9%); County of Mecklenburg - 5 (2%), and Southeastern Pathology Associates - 1 (0.4%). All autopsy examinations for District Attorney autopsy requests for violation of G.S. 14-18.4 are complete. Autopsy reports and death certificates are still in process for those in the later months. January 2025 data are still in process at the date of submission of this report.

Table 4. District Attorney Autopsy Request for Violation of G.S. 14-18.4, Jan. to Dec 2024[†]

Autopsy Center	Jan-Dec 2024	No. of Autopsy Examinations Completed	No. of Death Certificates Pending
Coastal Pathology Associates, PA	21	21	20
County of Mecklenburg	5	5	1
ECU Brody School of Medicine	20	20	7
Office of the Chief Medical Examiner	154	150	56
Southeastern Pathology Associates, PA	1	1	1
Wake Forest University	28	28	7
Total	229	225*	92

Note: † 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

*Four DA autopsy requests were rescinded, and autopsies were not performed under DA direction.

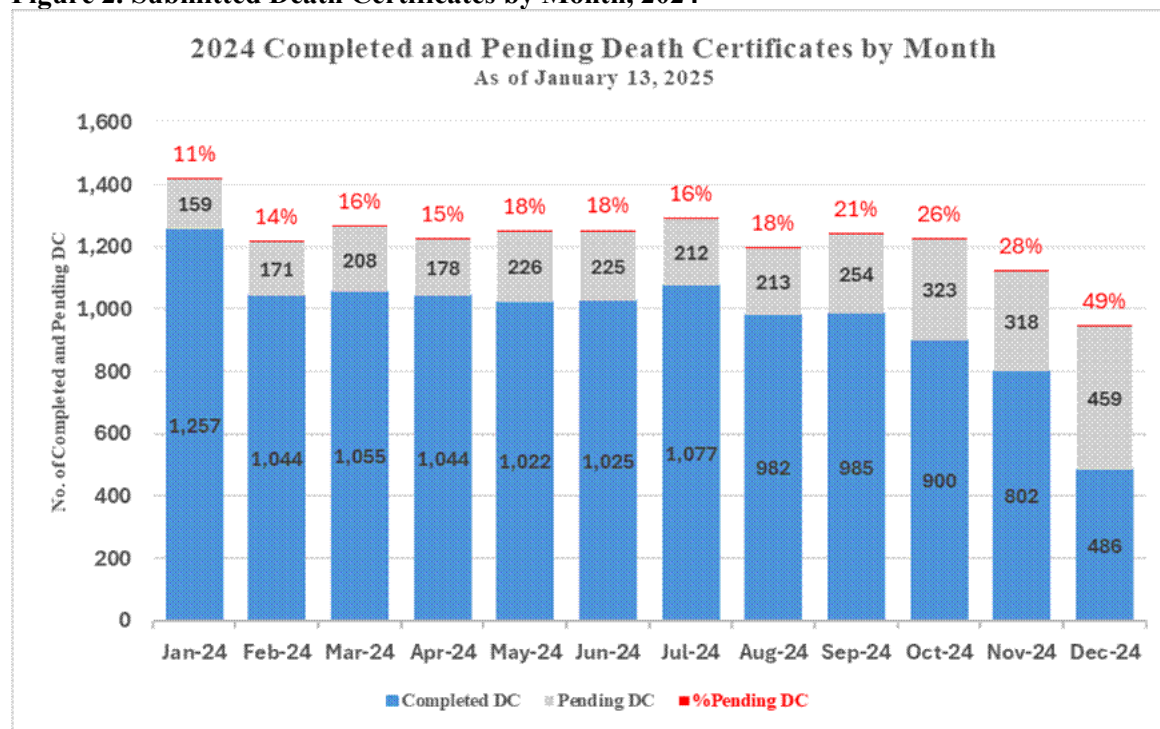
DEATH CERTIFICATES, 2024

We will be able to track and report the total number of outstanding autopsies and autopsy reports after the successful system wide launch of our new information technology system. Pending death certificates serve as a useful surrogate measure at this time and are reflected in Figure 2 below. The low numbers in general for the later months, including December, are reflective of a likely large number of cases that are in the process as of date of query (January 13, 2025) and are not accounted.

As of January 13, 2025, there were 14,625 deaths investigated by the ME system; 13,760 death certificates (94%) were certified by Medical Examiners for 2024. Based on the date of inquiry and time to complete a full death investigation including ancillary testing, it is not surprising that death certificates for earlier months in the year have lower percentages of death certificates that are either pending or not yet submitted. January has the lowest percentage of pending or not yet submitted death certificates of 11%.

Of medical examiner jurisdiction deaths occurring in 2024, 10.93% remain pending determination of death by the medical examiner. Comparatively, of medical examiner jurisdiction deaths occurring in 2023, just 1.13% remain pending determination of death.

Figure 2. Submitted Death Certificates by Month, 2024[†]



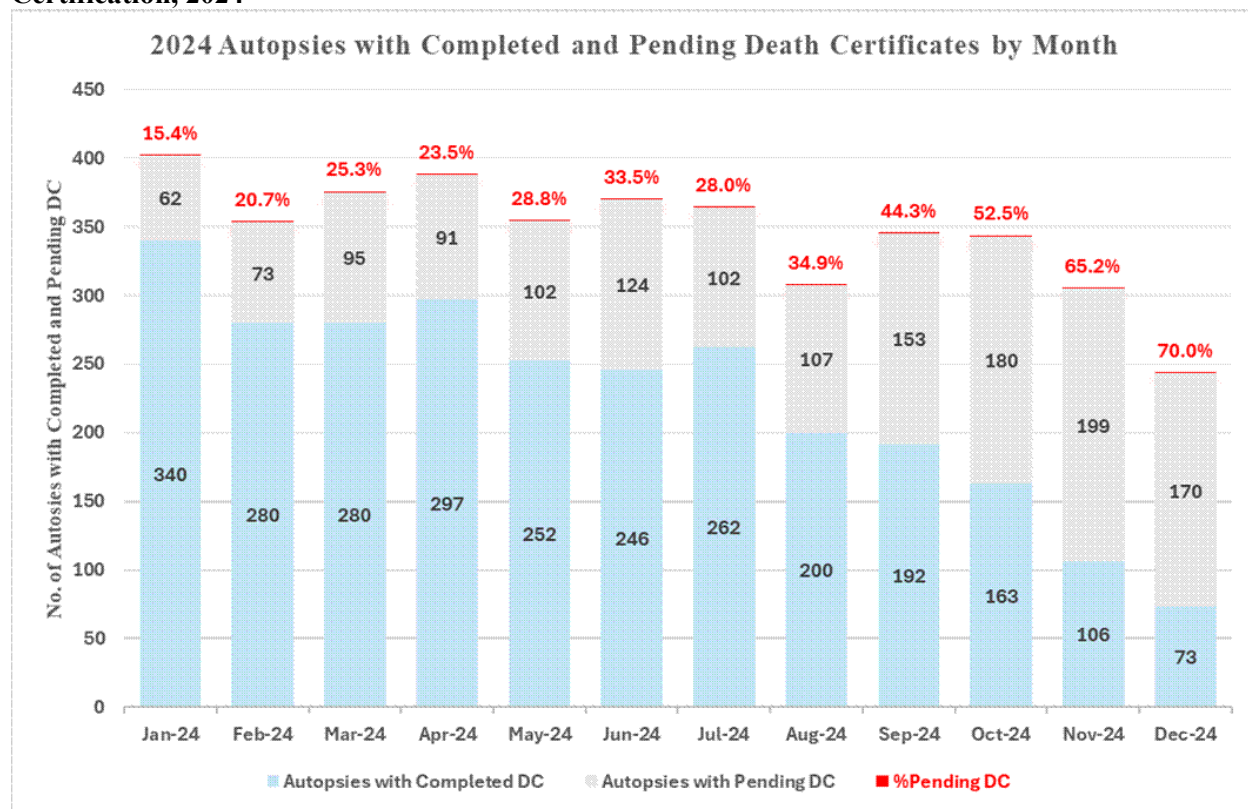
NOTE: Pending DC includes those with a pending manner of death or not yet submitted.

[†] 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

Autopsies with Pending Death Certificates, 2024

A total of 4,149 autopsies were performed by the ME system in 2024. Of those autopsy cases, 65% (n=2,691) final cause and manner of death have been reflected on the death certificate. This is a 6% improvement compared to 2023 (58%). Based on the date of inquiry and time to complete a full death investigation including ancillary testing, it is not surprising that death certificates on autopsy cases for earlier months in the year have lower percentages of death certificates that are either pending or not yet submitted. January 2024 has the lowest percentage of pending or not yet submitted death certificates on autopsy cases at 15.4%. The low autopsy numbers in general for the later months, including December, are reflective of a likely large number of cases that are in process as of the date of query (January 13, 2025) and are not accounted for.

Figure 3. Autopsies with Pending Death Certificates with Date of Death and Month of Death Certification, 2024[†]



Note: Pending DC includes those with a pending manner of death or not yet submitted
[†] 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

Table 5. Autopsies with Pending Death Certificates by County, 2024[†]

Alamance-25	Cumberland-59	Johnston-14	Randolph-24
Alexander-1	Currituck-2	Jones-5	Richmond-12
Alleghany-0	Dare-7	Lee-17	Robeson-34
Anson-10	Davidson-10	Lenoir-2	Rockingham-11
Ashe-3	Davie-6	Lincoln-6	Rowan-33
Avery-4	Duplin-24	McDowell-2	Rutherford-8
Beaufort-5	Durham-60	Macon-11	Sampson-16
Bertie-6	Edgecombe-7	Madison-0	Scotland-11
Bladen-4	Forsyth-34	Martin-1	Stanly-8
Brunswick-24	Franklin-7	Mecklenburg-54	Stokes-2
Buncombe-29	Gaston-21	Mitchell-0	Surry-7
Burke-8	Gates-1	Montgomery-3	Swain-7
Cabarrus-22	Graham-4	Moore-13	Transylvania-3
Caldwell-9	Granville-11	Nash-13	Tyrrell-0
Camden-0	Greene-2	New Hanover-103	Union-16
Carteret-25	Guilford-91	Northampton-5	Vance-9
Caswell-5	Halifax-9	Onslow-92	Wake-79
Catawba-15	Harnett-18	Orange-27	Warren-2
Chatham-7	Haywood-12	Pamlico-7	Washington-0
Cherokee-12	Henderson-6	Pasquotank-4	Watauga-4
Chowan-2	Hertford-3	Pender-15	Wayne-23
Clay-3	Hoke-7	Perquimans-2	Wilkes-8
Cleveland-5	Hyde-0	Person-7	Wilson-11
Columbus-14	Iredell-8	Pitt-20	Yadkin-2
Craven-41	Jackson-15	Polk-1	Yancey-1

Note: Pending DC includes those with a pending manner of death or not yet submitted.

[†] 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

Table 6. Autopsies with Pending Death Certificates by Autopsy Facility, 2024[†]

Type of Centers	Autopsy Centers & RACs	Pending Death Certificate
Regional Autopsy Center	East Carolina University	229
Regional Autopsy Center	County of Mecklenburg	80
Regional Autopsy Center	Office of the Chief Medical Examiner* Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD Southeastern Pathology Associates	699
Regional Autopsy Center	Wake Forest University Health Services	177
Regional Autopsy Center	South Piedmont**	-
Other Providers	Mountain Pathology Services	64
Other Providers	Coastal Pathology Associates	209
Other Providers	Falvy C. Barr, Jr., MD	-
Other Providers	Southeastern Pathology Associates	-
	TOTAL	1,458

Note: Pending autopsy death certificates cannot be easily separated into each regional and supporting facilities based on county of death given overlapping and backup county examination and ME coverage. Number of pending death certificates on autopsy cases is an **estimate** based on payment/billing information from 2024 correlated with county of death listed on the death certificates for information listed in above figure. See Regional and Supporting Facilities and Their Designated Counties. Pending DC includes those with a pending manner of death or not yet submitted.

[†] 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change.

* Data reported for OCME includes Dr. Barr and Southeastern Pathology Associates because services overlap with OCME.

**South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County opened December 17, 2024, and will be included in the 2025 data set.

Analysis of the Autopsy Fee Established by Subsection (a) of G.S. 130A-389

Prior to July 1, 2024, the autopsy fee was \$2,800, with the county where the deceased resided paying \$1,750 and the State paying the remaining \$1,050, unless the death occurred outside the deceased's county, in which case the State paid the entire fee of \$2,800.

Section 9H.8(c) of S.L. 2023-134 amended G.S. 130A-389 and increased autopsy fees from \$2,800 to \$5,800, with the county where the deceased resided paying \$3,625, and the State paying the remaining \$2,175, unless the death occurred outside the deceased's county, in which case the State pays the entire fee of \$5,800. This section became effective July 1, 2024.

OCME tracks payments based on invoicing and not the date of death, which is due to a time lag between the date of death of a decedent, submission of invoice from the autopsy center, determination of State versus County pay, and invoicing/payment. This means that the OCME report will not match the monthly death certificate data, and invoicing/payments that have not yet been submitted or are in process for calendar year 2024. In addition, the State has no visibility into the receipt of County payments by autopsy centers once the OCME invoices the Counties for autopsy payment. Therefore, assessment of the impact of the newly established autopsy fee will be focused on the number of autopsies identified from death certificate data and projected expenditures once the payment process is complete.

Based on historical billing and receipts data from FY 2021-22, 83% of the autopsy cases will have county payment in addition to the base State payment and 17% of the autopsies will be completely paid for by the State.

The projected state and county expenditures for calendar year 2024 is \$17,335,400. Tables 7 and 8 separate this anticipated payment from the six months prior (January 1, 2024 – June 30, 2024) to the fee increase compared to the six months following (July 1, 2024 – December 31, 2024) the fee increase. The projected total increase in expenditures from both the state (\$2,303,166) and the county (\$2,482,634) is \$4,785,800 for the six-month period.

Table 7: Fee Analysis for Autopsy Facilities, Jan-June 2024[†]

January - June 2024					
Type of Centers	Autopsy Centers & RACs	No. of Autopsy Performed	State Expenditure	County Expenditure	Total Expenditure
Regional Autopsy Center	East Carolina University	337	\$454,107.50	\$489,492.50	\$943,600.00
Regional Autopsy Center	Mecklenburg Medical Examiner	364	\$490,490.00	\$528,710.00	\$1,019,200.00
Regional Autopsy Center	Office of Chief Medical Examiner*	781	\$1,052,397.50	\$1,134,402.50	\$2,186,800.00
Regional Autopsy Center	Wake Forest University	545	\$734,387.50	\$791,612.50	\$1,526,000.00
Other Providers	WestCare-Harris Regional Hospital	66	\$88,935.00	\$95,865.00	\$184,800.00

Other Providers	Onslow Memorial Hospital	148	\$199,430.00	\$214,970.00	\$414,400.00
	TOTAL	2,241	\$3,019,747.50	\$3,255,052.50	\$6,274,800.00

* Data reported for OCME includes Dr. Barr and Southeastern Pathology Associates because services overlap with OCME

† 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change. The total payment per autopsy Jan-June 2024 is \$2,800.

South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County opened December 17, 2024, and will be included in the 2025 data set.

Table 8: Fee Analysis for Autopsy Facilities, Jul-Dec 2024[†]

July-December 2024					
Type of Centers	Autopsy Centers & RACs	No. of Autopsy Performed	State Expenditure	County Expenditure	Total Expenditure
Regional Autopsy Center	East Carolina University	296	\$826,210.00	\$890,590.00	\$1,716,800.00
Regional Autopsy Center	Mecklenburg Medical Examiner	291	\$812,253.75	\$875,546.25	\$1,687,800.00
Regional Autopsy Center	Office of Chief Medical Examiner*	697	\$1,945,501.25	\$2,097,098.75	\$4,042,600.00
Regional Autopsy Center	Wake Forest University	414	\$1,155,577.50	\$1,245,622.50	\$2,401,200.00
Other Providers	WestCare-Harris Regional Hospital	50	\$139,562.50	\$150,437.50	\$290,000.00
Other Providers	Onslow Memorial Hospital	159	\$443,808.75	\$478,391.25	\$922,200.00
	TOTAL	1,907	\$5,322,913.75	\$5,737,686.25	\$11,060,600.00

* Data reported for OCME includes Dr. Barr and Southeastern Pathology Associates because services overlap with OCME

† 2024 Data are provisional data and subject to change. The total payment per autopsy Jul-Dec 2024 is \$5,800.

South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County opened December 17, 2024, and will be included in the 2025 data set.

TECHNICAL NOTES

Deaths Investigated

“Deaths Investigated” in this report include deaths reported to the medical examiner where the ME accepts jurisdiction. Death totals include North Carolina residents and non-North Carolina residents whose deaths were investigated under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner. Deaths investigated include Medical Examiner Investigator Scene Investigations as well as reported deaths that, while may not allow for a scene investigation, involved an investigation beyond the initial report of the death, usually in the form of a records review in response to information provided as part of a cremation request.

County of Death

Deaths in this report are assigned to the county where the decedent was pronounced dead, rather than county of residence or the county where an event leading to death may have occurred. For example, an individual is injured in one county and is transported and later pronounced dead in a different county. This death is reported to the medical examiner of the second county where the individual was pronounced dead.

ME Jurisdiction

Refers to any death where the ME assumes jurisdiction in accordance with § 130A-383 of the North Carolina General Statutes. These include autopsies performed at the four regional autopsy centers and the four hospital-based pathology practices that are contracted to perform autopsies for the ME system.

OCME Jurisdiction

Deaths that fall under OCME jurisdiction are defined as deaths autopsied at the OCME and deaths investigated in one of the 33 counties OCME provides examination (autopsy, external exam, supplemental exam) and medical examiner services: Alamance, **Anson, Bladen, **Cabarrus, Caswell, Chatham, Columbus, Cumberland, Durham, Franklin, Granville, Guilford, Harnett, Hoke, Johnston, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, Orange, Person, Randolph, Richmond, Robeson*, Rockingham, Rowan, Sampson*, Scotland, Stanly, **Union, Vance, Wake, Warren, and Wayne.

**NOTE: County designations may overlap with multiple regional facilities.*

***NOTE: Absorbed by OCME in 2022 without additional resources when autopsy center eliminated coverage. South Piedmont Regional Autopsy Center in Union County opened December 17, 2024, to provide coverage for Union County, and will be included in the 2025 data set.*

Additional Technical Notes

1. Toxicology results are based on blood, vitreous fluid, or other specimens used for testing at the discretion of the pathologist and/or toxicologist.
2. Percentages may total above or below 100% due to rounding.