

JOINT LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE  
ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

NC Department of Health and Human Services

# Death Investigation and Death Certificates

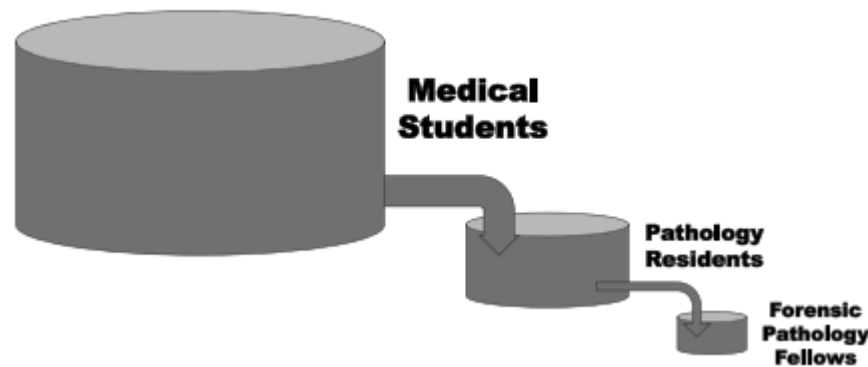
**ClarLynda Williams-Devane, MD**

**Senior Deputy Director,  
Division of Public Health**

**October 11, 2022**

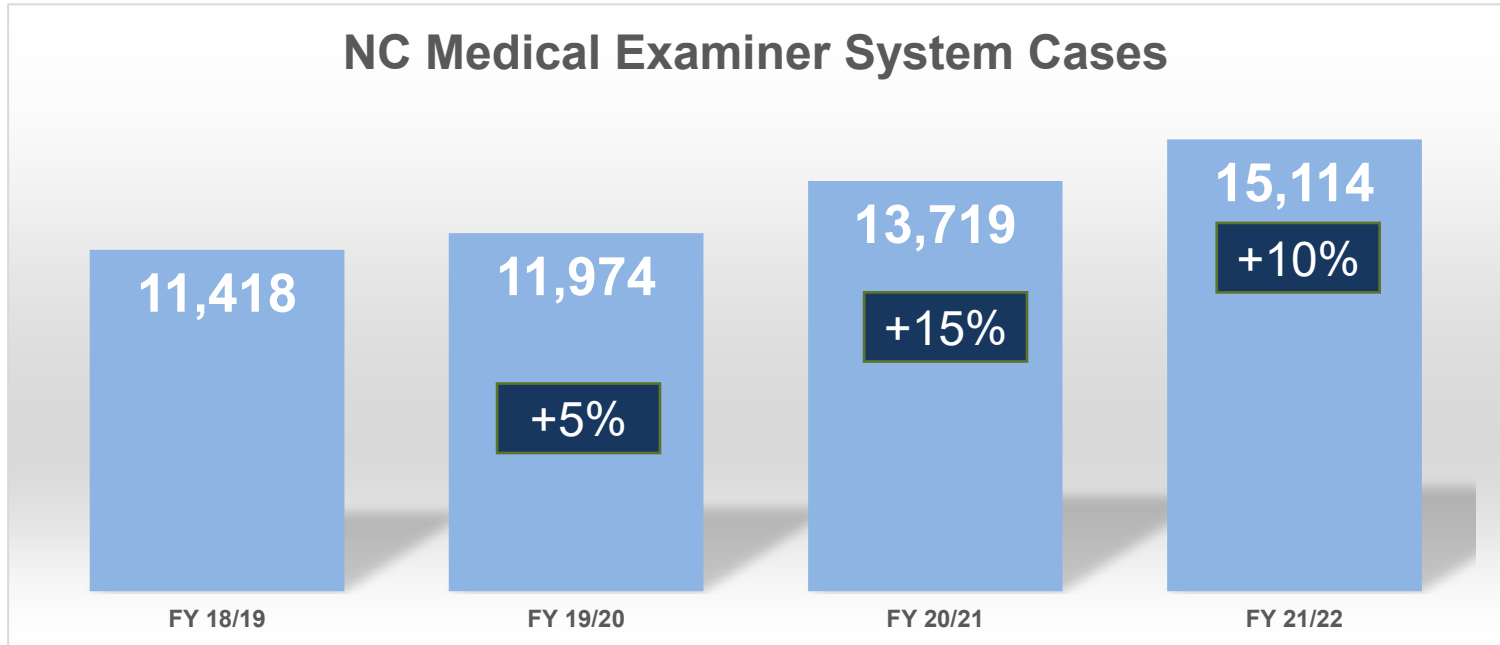
# Medical Examiner System Nationally

- **National Standard 250 Autopsies per year**
  - Maximum 325 Autopsies per year
- **OCME 557 Autopsies per year**
- **National Shortage of Forensic Pathologists**
  - 500 practicing board certified forensic pathologists
  - 1280 forensic pathologists needed (shortage of 780)
  - 40 new forensic pathologists per year



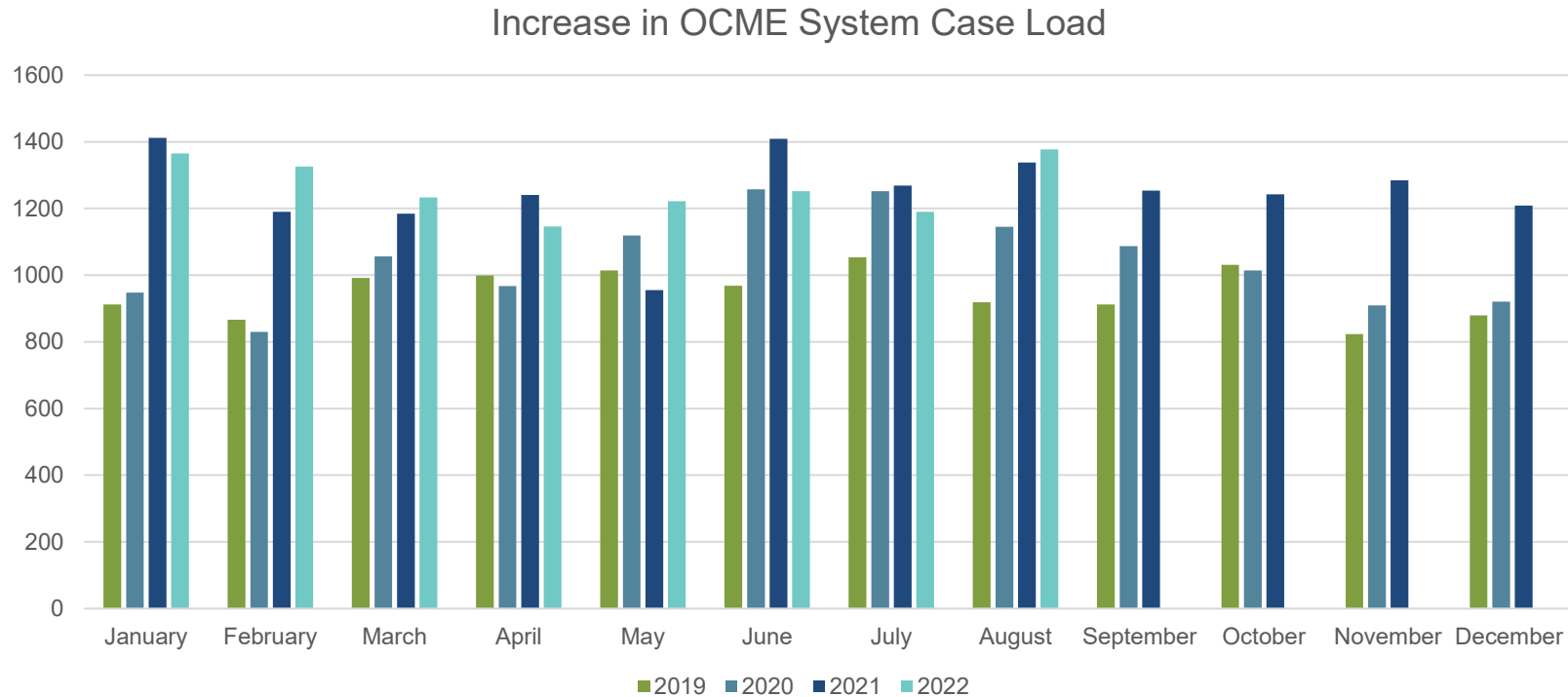
*SOURCE: The National Association of Medical Examiners*

# NC Medical Examiner System



- **Greater than 30% increase overall from FY 18/19 to FY 21/22**

# OCME System Case Load

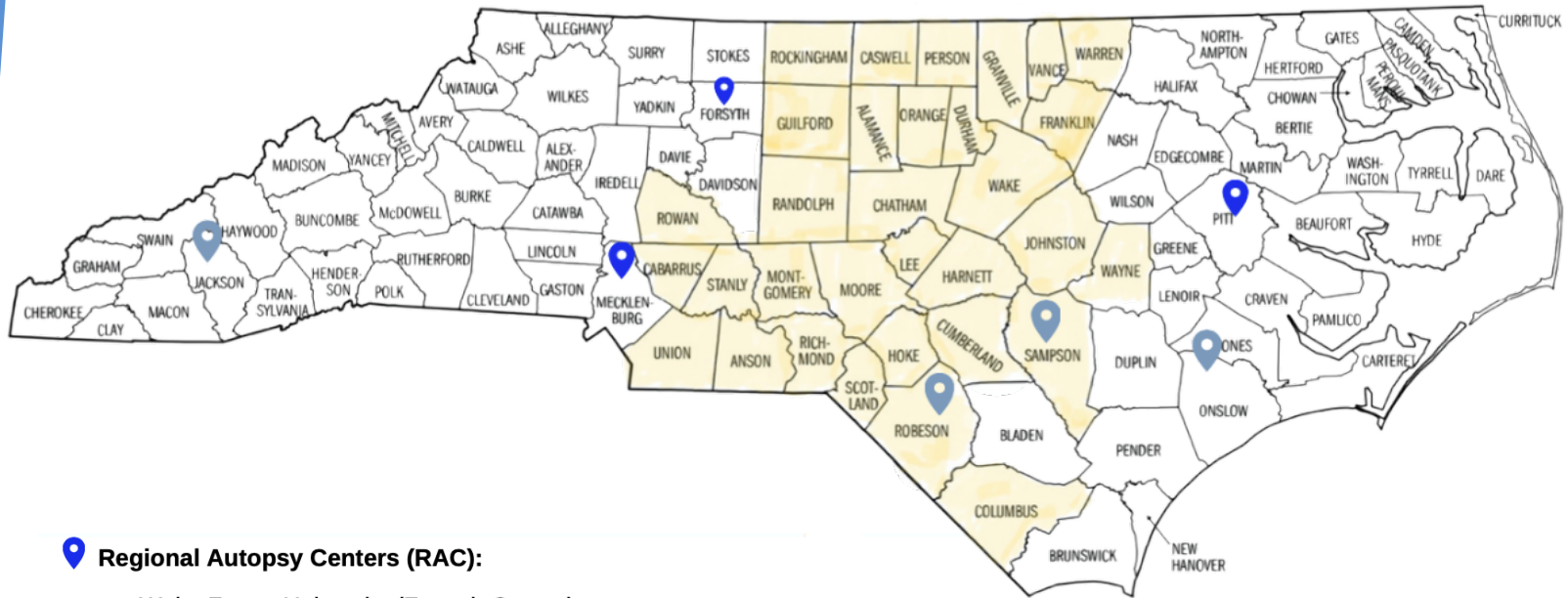


- **Increasing NC Population**
- **Increasing Complexity of Cases**
- **49.8% increase from August 2019 to August 2022**

# NC Medical Examiner System Roles

- **C/L ME- County or Local Medical Examiner**
- **Autopsy Center - Pathologist**
  - **Standard Autopsies**
- **Regional Autopsy Center – Forensic Pathologist**
  - **Complex Autopsies**
- **Medicolegal Investigators (MDI)**
- **Forensic Toxicologist**

# State and Regional Relationships



## 📍 Regional Autopsy Centers (RAC):

- Wake Forest University (Forsyth County)
- East Carolina University Brody School of Medicine (Pitt County)
- Mecklenburg County Medical Examiner (Mecklenburg County)

Regional Autopsy Centers (RAC) report to/contract with the OCME and are performed by [Forensic Pathologist](#)

## 📍 Autopsy Centers :

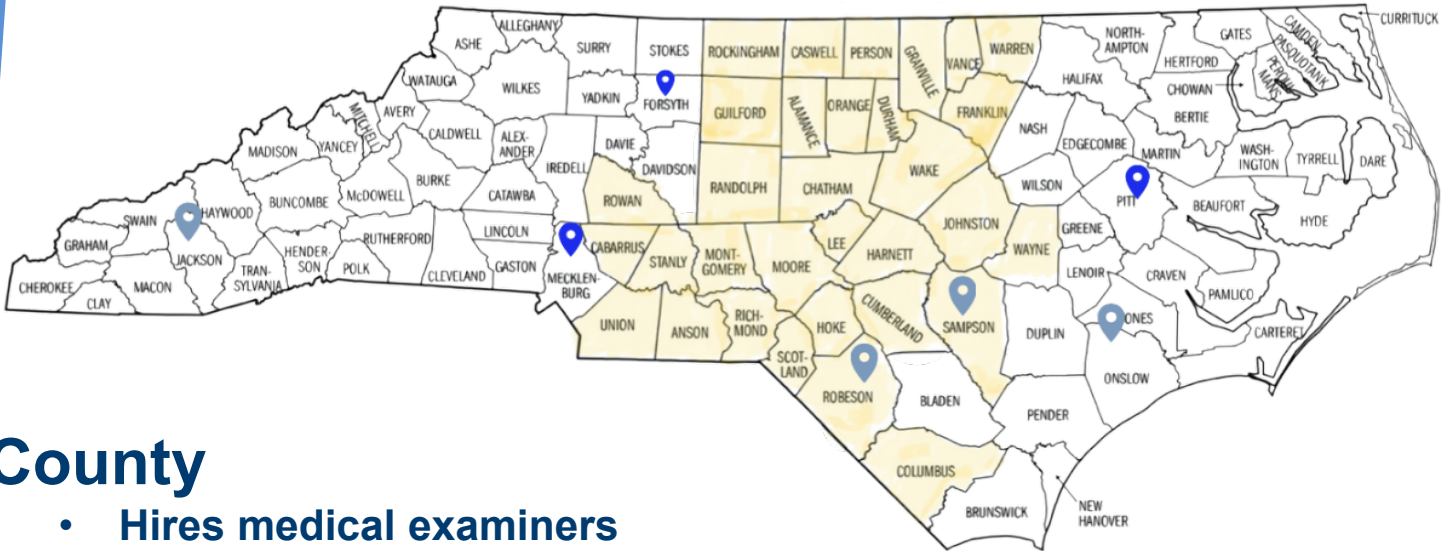
- Mountain Pathology (Jackson County (Sylva, NC))
- Coastal Pathology (*Onslow County*)
- Falvy Barr, MD (Sampson Regional Medical Center) (Sampson County)
- Southeastern Pathology (Robeson County)

[Pathologist](#) perform autopsies at these locations

**Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME): the following counties are serviced by OCME :**

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

# State and Regional Relationships



## County

- Hires medical examiners
  - Paid per examination; fee set in legislation
- Arranges decedent storage

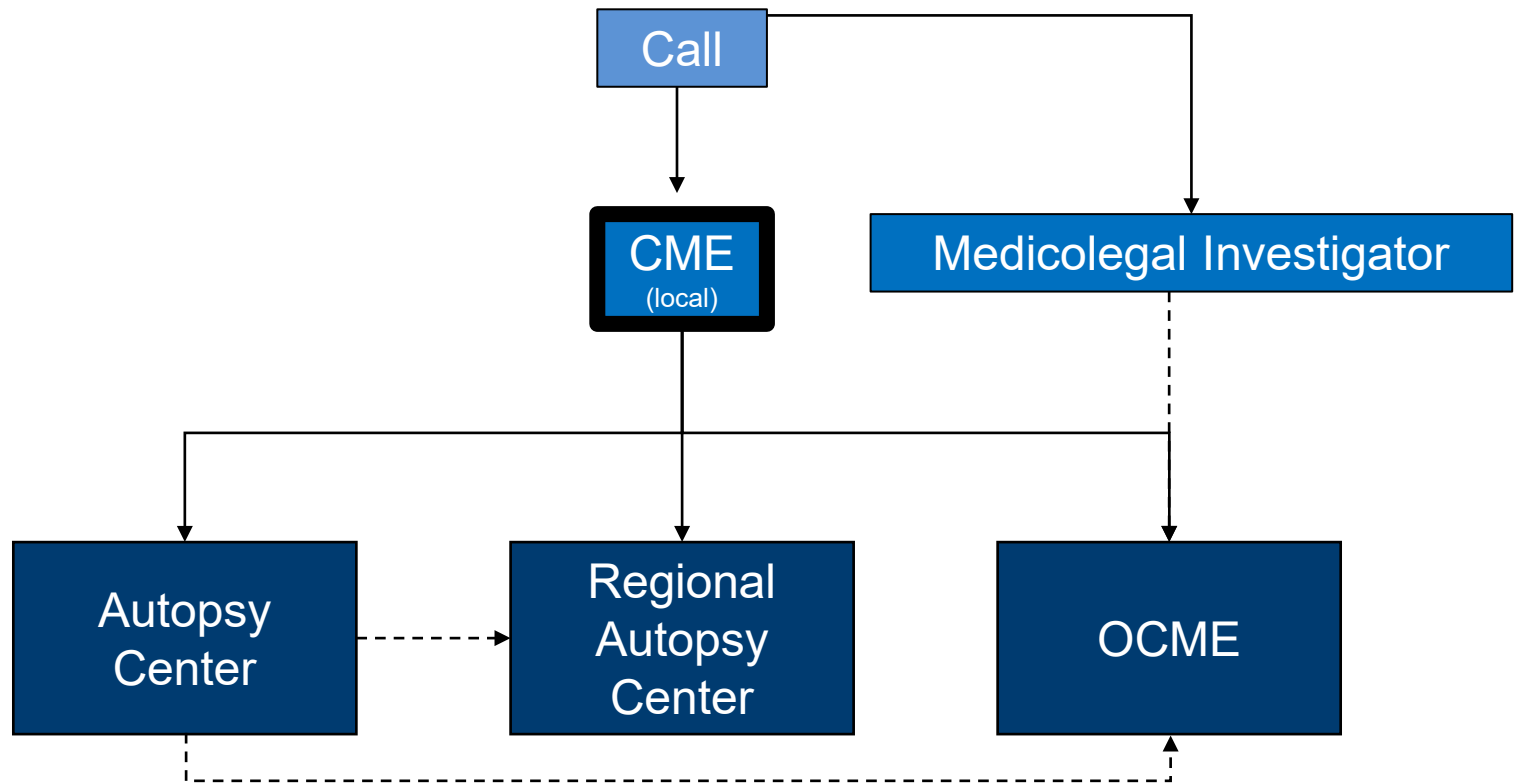
## State-contracted services

- Autopsy Centers covering 67 counties
  - Paid per autopsy; fee set in legislation
- Transporters
  - Fee set in legislation; just increased

## State

- Conducts exams for counties not served by RAC
  - Currently serve 33 Counties
- Conducts Toxicology Test Statewide

# NC Medical Examiner System

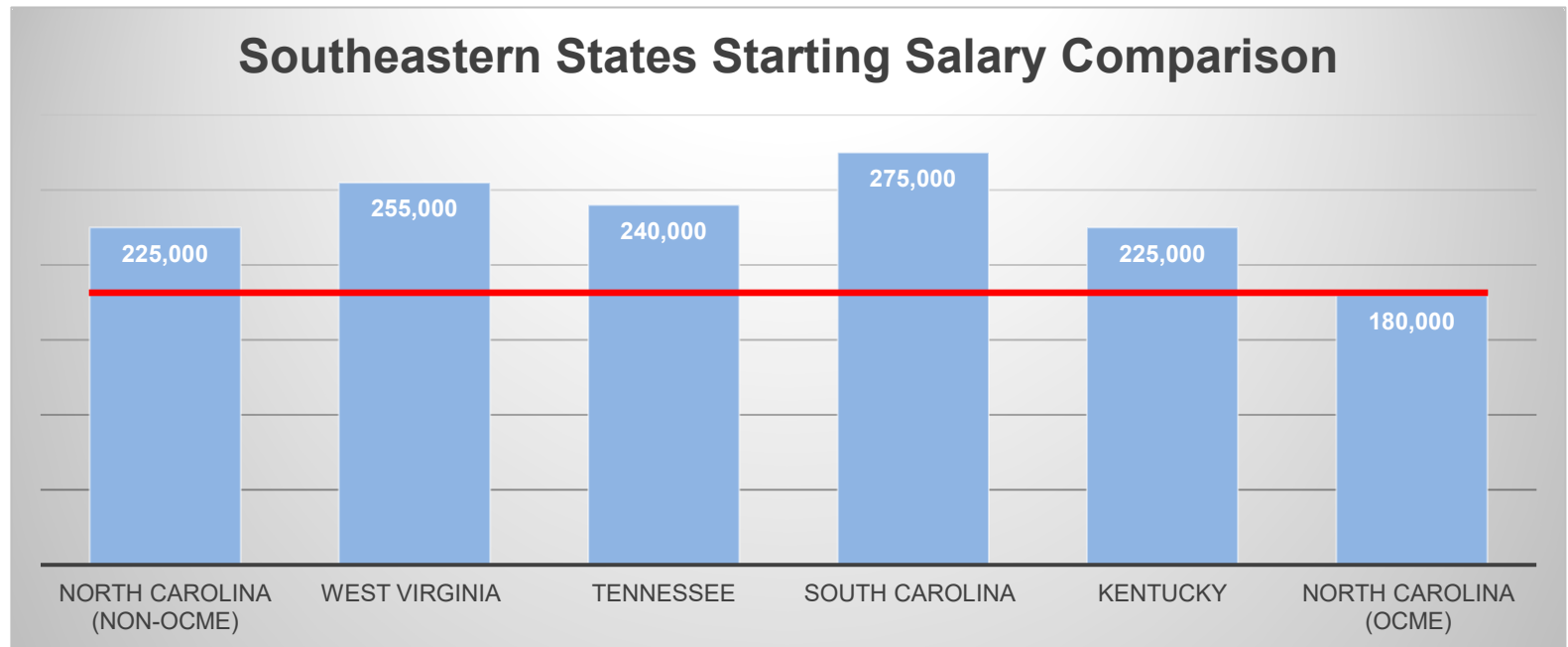




# Medical Examiners

- **Medical Examiners in NC**
  - **Nurse**
  - **Nurse Practitioner**
  - **Physician Assistant**
  - **Physician**
  - **Emergency Medical Technicians / Paramedics**
- **Medicolegal Investigators**
  - **ABMDI Certified**
  - **Masters in Forensic Science**
- **Dentist**
- **Physical Therapist**

# Forensic Pathology Salaries



- **Average Forensic Pathologist Salary**
  - **Nationally \$308,000**

# Autopsy Reimbursement Rates

- **NC reimbursement is \$2800 (set in 2015)**
- **Actual cost of autopsy \$5800**
- **Other expenses for autopsy centers**
  - Medical Examiner Coverage
  - Reports
  - Supplies and Infrastructure
  - Court Testimony
  - Death Certificate Review

# Consequences

- **Fewer Medical Examiners available to go on scene pulls on pathologists' time who must go to scene**
- **Fewer autopsy centers conducting cases means more cases must be absorbed by state OCME**
- **Both mean longer wait time for families**

## Efforts

- **Implemented transporter fee (\$95 to \$170) in August but retroactive to July**
- **Posted 7 forensic pathology positions**
- **Continuing Fellowship Program for Forensic Pathologists with UNC Chapel Hill**
- **Developing a pipeline program for Autopsy Technicians**
- **Conducting Regional Listening Meetings for Autopsy Centers and Medical Examiners.**

# ME System Conclusions

- **Regional Autopsy Centers (RACs) are contractually underfunded by an estimated ~\$3000 per autopsy.**
  - Increased Burden on OCME
  - Longer Processing Times
  - Retention of RACs
  - Reduced County Coverage
- **OCME staff are underpaid to support the growing NC population**

# NC DAVE: Time for Death Registration Decreased by 95%

Month of Death	Total Deaths Registered	Days from Death-to-Death Registration
Jan-20	8735	48.6
Feb-20	8324	46.6
Mar-20	8859	45.5
Apr-20	8742	38.9
May-20	8976	36.8
Jun-20	8302	37.5
Jul-20	9067	44.2
Aug-20	9359	58.9
Sep-20	9198	99.2
Oct-20	9501	120.5
Nov-20	9979	115.5
Dec-20	11608	111.2
Jan-21	13136	114.3
Feb-21	9810	143.4
Mar-21	9041	130.2
Apr-21	8791	118.6
May-21	9028	108.8
Jun-21	8358	87.3
Jul-21	8831	86.2
Aug-21	10521	84.0
Sep-21	11221	72.7
Oct-21	10473	62.6
Nov-21	9514	63.4
Dec-21	10504	49.8
Jan-22	12094	41.9
Feb-22	9663	33.3
Mar-22	8786	22.3
Apr-22	8196	16.8
May-22	8699	10.1
Jun-22	8653	9.0
Jul-22	8816	8.4
Aug-22	8614	7.1

95% Reduction in Death Registration Time from 143.4 to 7.1 days

# Death Certificates (NCDAVE)

## 2022 Death Registration by Method

