

# Idaho Coroner Development and Standards Plan

Prepared for: Idaho Legislative Review and Appropriations Committee

## Executive Summary

Idaho's Coroner system operates within a locally controlled framework. This allows flexibility, but has led to significant disparities in capability, access to forensic services, and investigative consistency across counties. Smaller, rural counties often lack the infrastructure and professional resources needed to meet statutory responsibilities, while larger counties bear the burden of serving as regional autopsy and storage hubs without dedicated state support.

This plan outlines a 6-year, tiered strategy to professionalize and stabilize Idaho's coroner system.

Funding for the initiative will be derived from a modest increase in state death certificate fees, which provides a predictable, self-sustaining source of revenue that does not draw from the general fund or impose unfunded mandates on counties. Funds will be used for infrastructure, training, and forensic development. They will not be used for expendable items, consumables, or staffing. The plan includes one-year, three-year, and 6-year phases aligned with population-based tiers that ensure equity and scalability.

## Strategic Objectives

1. Establish Statewide Minimum capabilities: Ensure every Idaho coroner's office meets baseline facility, storage and investigation capability consistent with national standards as recommended by NAME and IACME to **adequately serve all Idaho communities**.
2. Standardize Professional Training: Require statewide certification of coroners and deputy coroners through ABMDI or equivalent programs within a defined timeframe and **improve investigation quality through accreditation and certification**.
3. Create Regional Forensic Capacity: Develop regional forensic hubs that serve multiple counties, reducing the cost and distance of autopsy and evidence processing. Build Long-Term Forensic Infrastructure: Develop Regional-based autopsy, imaging, and capabilities to reduce overburden on current state providers and **expand autopsy capacity**.
4. Implement Sustainable Funding and Oversight: Establish a predictable revenue stream and transparent allocation process through a dedicated Coroner Development and Standards Fund that will **support measured growth and statutory obligations**.

## Phase One: One-Year Foundation Plan

**Goal:** Establish uniform baseline standards and reliable operational capability across Idaho. Actions include: conducting a statewide assessment of coroner offices, developing minimum equipment standards, launching the Coroner Grant Program, creating online training modules, and establishing the **Idaho Forensic Resource Committee (IFRC)** and the **Idaho Coroner Training Oversight Committee (ICTOC)**. Fund an interim Locum program that will be phased out while regional Pathology centers get online.

**Strategy:** This initiative will be implemented through a coordinated, multi-phase strategy emphasizing assessment, standardization, and capacity-building:

1. **Assessment Phase:**

Conduct a comprehensive statewide survey of coroner offices to evaluate current equipment, facilities, staffing, and training needs. Data collected will serve as the baseline for resource allocation and policy development.

2. **Standardization Phase:**

Develop and adopt minimum operational and equipment standards that reflect national best practices and align with NAME and ABMDI guidelines. These standards will define eligibility for participation in the Coroner Modernization Grant Program.

3. **Capacity-Building Phase:**

- Launch the **Coroner Grant Program** to fund equipment purchases, infrastructure improvements, and training that help offices meet established standards.
- Create **online training modules** to provide consistent, accessible education for all Idaho coroners and deputies, ensuring a uniform level of competency statewide.
- Establish the **IFRC** to oversee funding, compliance audits, and continuous improvement.
- Establish the **ICTOC** to oversee training standards, compliance audits, and continuous improvement.

4. **Interim Operations Support:**

Implement a **Locum Pathologist Program** to maintain autopsy coverage while regional pathology centers are developed. The program will be phased out as permanent centers come online, ensuring uninterrupted service throughout the transition.

**Expected outcomes:** Idaho coroner offices operate under consistent statewide standards with reliable equipment, training, and procedures. The Coroner Grant Program supports offices that meet these benchmarks. The Idaho Forensic Resource Committee oversees training and quality assurance, while the interim Locum Pathologist Program maintains autopsy services until regional pathology centers are established, creating a unified and professional statewide system.

## Phase Two: Three-Year Regionalization and Training Plan

**Goal:** Strengthen regional capacity, training, and forensic coordination.

Actions include: establishing three Regional Forensic Hubs, creating a state forensic pathologist locum network, requiring ABMDI certification (or equivalent), implementing a digital case management system, and offering tier-based funding incentives.

**Strategy:** This initiative will advance Idaho's medicolegal death investigation system through a phased approach that builds infrastructure, professional competency, and technological integration:

1. **Regionalization of Services:**

Establish **three Regional Forensic Hubs** strategically located to serve northern, southwestern, and eastern Idaho. Each hub will provide autopsy services, evidence consultation, and training support to surrounding counties, reducing transportation costs and turnaround times.

2. **Pathologist Workforce Network:**

Develop a **State Forensic Pathologist Locum Network** to provide consistent autopsy coverage and consultation during vacancies, high caseloads, or transitions. This ensures continuity of service while permanent regional staff are recruited and retained.

3. **Professional Certification and Standards:**

Require **ABMDI certification** (or state-approved equivalent) for coroners and deputies. Offer online and regional training opportunities to support compliance, ensuring that all investigators meet recognized national standards for medicolegal competency.

4. **Technology Integration:**

Implement a **digital case management system** to unify statewide case tracking, facilitate interagency data sharing, and enhance transparency in reporting. This system will standardize recordkeeping, reduce redundancy, and enable efficient performance evaluation.

5. **Tier-Based Funding Incentives:**

Introduce a **tiered funding model** that rewards offices for achieving certification, meeting equipment standards, and actively participating in statewide reporting and training programs. This approach aligns funding with measurable professional progress and accountability.

**Expected outcomes:** 75% of autopsies within 150 miles of origin, all coroners certified or in training, and a functional statewide case management network.

## Phase Three: Six-Year Sustainability and Forensic Development Plan

**Goal:** Build a self-sustaining, professionally standardized medicolegal system.

**Strategy:** This long-term initiative focuses on creating a permanent, self-reliant forensic

infrastructure that aligns Idaho with national standards for medicolegal death investigation and pathology services. Implementation will occur through the following integrated strategies:

1. **Infrastructure Development:**

Utilize a **Design–Bid–Build** approach to construct **regional medical examiner facilities** that serve as the foundation of Idaho’s forensic system. Each facility will include autopsy suites, evidence storage, training areas, and digital connectivity to statewide systems. This ensures transparent procurement, professional design input, and accountability through structured project management.

2. **Workforce Sustainability:**

Create a **state-sponsored Forensic Pathology Fellowship Program** in collaboration with regional universities and medical institutions. The fellowship will recruit and train new pathologists while offering structured mentorship and incentives to remain in Idaho, securing long-term staffing stability.

3. **In-State Forensic Collaboration:**

Establish formal partnerships with **state toxicology, histology, and DNA laboratories** to streamline postmortem testing, reduce outsourcing, and improve turnaround times. Shared data systems and protocols will ensure consistent quality and compliance with NAME standards.

4. **Accountability and Legislative Oversight:**

Implement **annual reporting to the Legislature** detailing caseloads, turnaround times, certification status, and fiscal performance of each regional facility. This transparency reinforces public trust, supports future appropriations, and provides data-driven oversight of statewide forensic operations.

**Expected outcomes:** Idaho achieves forensic self-sufficiency, meets national standards, and reduces autopsy turnaround times by 40%.

## Funding Mechanism

The Coroner Development and Standards Fund will be created within the [State Treasury]. Revenue will come from an increase in death certificate fees, which are currently among the lowest in the region. This proposed an increase per death certificate would generate funds that will be earmarked solely for capital investment, infrastructure, approved training, and statewide forensic development. Allocations will be distributed through the Idaho Forensic Resource Committee (IFRC), a subcommittee of the Idaho Association of County Coroners operating under legislative oversight. Counties will be eligible for funding once they demonstrate compliance with established standards Maintained by Idaho Coroner Training Oversight Committee (ICTOC) and submit approved Development and Standards plans.

Structure	Process
<p>Idaho Legislature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>└ Idaho Association of County Coroners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>└ IFRC (Funding Oversight) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>└ Manages Fund</li> <li>└ Approves Grants</li> <li>└ Audits &amp; Reports</li> </ul> </li> <li>└ ICTOC (Training Oversight) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>└ Sets Standards</li> <li>└ Tracks Certification</li> <li>└ Recommends Equivalentents</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Death Certificate Fee Increase</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>State Treasury → Coroner Development &amp; Standards Fund</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>Idaho Forensic Resource Committee</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p> <p>County Coroner Offices (eligible by standards compliance)</p>

No funds will be allocated for expendable materials, consumables, or wages. Priority will be given to long-term assets that strengthen local and regional capacity.

Coroner offices that seek funding must demonstrate a commitment to improving their offices; maintaining standards, developing policies and procedures, matched contributions from County or other requirements as identified by the IFRC committee. Available funding is contingent on improving the services provided to Idaho citizens.

### Idaho Forensic Resource Committee (IFRC)

The **Idaho Forensic Resource Committee (IFRC)** shall serve as the governing and oversight body responsible for managing all fiscal and operational aspects of the Coroner Development and Standards Fund. Operating under the Idaho Association of County Coroners and with legislative oversight, the IFRC will ensure transparent and equitable allocation of funds, establish statewide infrastructure priorities, and monitor compliance with established standards for eligibility.

The IFRC will operate in coordination with the **Idaho Coroner Training Oversight Committee (ICTOC)** to align funding decisions with verified compliance and professional competency. Counties will remain eligible for funding only when they demonstrate adherence to infrastructure, training, and operational standards as approved by the IFRC.

### Composition of the Committee

The IFRC shall consist of **nine members** appointed by the Idaho Association of County Coroners in consultation with the Idaho Legislature. Membership will ensure balanced representation across population tiers, regions, and professional disciplines.

Membership shall include:

- One coroner representative from each regional forensic hub (North, South, East)
- One representative from the Idaho Association of Counties
- One representative from the Idaho State Police or other investigative law enforcement agency
- One representative from the State Board of Medicine or a university-affiliated pathology department

- One county commissioner from a small or rural county
- One representative from a large or metropolitan county
- One legislative liaison appointed jointly by the House and Senate Health and Welfare Committees

### **Duties and Responsibilities**

1. **Manage and Distribute Funds:**  
Review, approve, and allocate funding requests in accordance with the population-based tier system and established eligibility standards.
2. **Monitor Compliance:**  
Verify that participating coroner offices have met all infrastructure and training requirements prior to receiving or renewing funding.
3. **Evaluate Statewide Needs:**  
Conduct regular assessments of Idaho's medicolegal infrastructure, including storage capacity, autopsy facilities, transportation logistics, and forensic resource gaps.
4. **Prioritize Long-Term Investments:**  
Direct available funding toward durable capital improvements and statewide systems such as forensic data management, cold storage, or regional examination facilities.
5. **Maintain Transparency and Reporting:**  
Publish an annual financial and performance report for submission to the Legislature and make the report available to the public through the Idaho Association of County Coroners.
6. **Coordinate with the ICTOC:**  
Work in partnership with the Idaho Coroner Training Oversight Committee to ensure training compliance aligns with fiscal eligibility requirements.

**Purpose and Impact:** The IFRC ensures that the distribution of state-generated funds promotes fairness, transparency, and measurable outcomes. Through structured oversight and annual reporting, the committee prevents inequitable allocation, ensures that limited resources are spent effectively, and supports Idaho's long-term forensic development goals.

### **Training Oversight Committee**

To ensure consistent professional standards and eligibility for funding, the **Idaho Coroner Training Oversight Committee (ICTOC)** shall be established under the Idaho Association of County Coroners in coordination with the Idaho Forensic Resource Committee (IFRC).

The ICTOC will serve as the governing body for evaluating, approving, and maintaining statewide training standards for coroner and deputy coroner offices. This committee will ensure that all county offices demonstrate competency consistent with national best practices and will monitor compliance with training requirements as a condition for participation in the Coroner Development and Standards Fund.

The ICTOC will consist of **seven members** appointed by the Idaho Association of County Coroners, representing diverse county populations and professional expertise. Membership shall include:

- One representative from each regional forensic hub (North, South, East)
- Two certified ABMDI or NAME-accredited investigators
- One representative from law enforcement with investigative experience
- One representative from the Idaho State Board of Medicine or a designee from a partnering academic institution

### **Duties and Responsibilities**

1. **Establish and Maintain Statewide Training Standards:**  
Define and periodically review the minimum required training for coroners and deputies, consistent with ABMDI and NAME guidelines, and recommend curriculum updates as practices evolve.
2. **Oversee Certification Equivalency:**  
For coroner offices unable to obtain ABMDI certification due to cost or access limitations, the committee shall identify and approve equivalent state-recognized training programs that meet or exceed comparable competency standards.
3. **Ensure Eligibility for Funding:**  
Maintain a current list of offices that have met required training standards. Only those offices in compliance shall remain eligible for funding through the Coroner Development and Standards Fund.
4. **Develop Online and Regional Training Resources:**  
Coordinate the development of standardized training modules and regional workshops for continuing education, in partnership with the Idaho Association of Counties and law enforcement academies.
5. **Annual Review and Reporting:**  
Submit an annual training and compliance report to the Idaho Forensic Resource Committee and the Legislature, summarizing certification progress, approved equivalencies, and statewide participation rates.

**Purpose and Impact:** The ICTOC ensures Idaho’s coroner system maintains **professional consistency and accountability** across all jurisdictions. By defining and enforcing clear statewide training standards, this committee closes the gap between counties with unequal resources and prevents funding disparities caused by limited access to ABMDI certification.

### **Tiered Framework for County Support**

Support is based on county population density. The objective is to create reasonable resources and infrastructure and to increase the support needed as each county grows.

Tier 1: Under 25,000 – Establish foundational readiness, transport vehicle, evidence storage, collaborative digital case management system, standardized training.

Tier 2: under 100,000 – Build professional capability (basic holding area, exam room, cold storage, lift system, training funds for deputy coroners).

Tier 3: Over 100,000 – Capable Forensic Pathology Center (autopsy suite, imaging, long term storage). Interim subsidized funding for Locum doctors as a temporary solution until such facility is actualized (Pilot program, that would not be in perpetuity, to fund unmet expectation that

Locums require). Regional resources and support for other counties (mass casualty, Memorandums of understanding, Critical incident response).

<b>Tiered County Support Matrix</b>			
Tier	Population	Infrastructure Level	Key Support
1	<25K	Transport/lift, evidence storage, digital case access	Foundational readiness
2	<100K	Holding area, exam room, cold storage	Professional Capability
3	>100K	Forensic pathology center	Regional hub, locum transition

## **Fiscal Stewardship and Accountability**

All revenue from the increased death certificate fee will be deposited into the Coroner Development and Standards Fund. The Idaho Forensic Resource Committee will manage grants and ensure compliance. Annual audits and legislative reports will verify transparent use of funds. Allocations are restricted to durable capital improvements and prohibited from covering expendables or payroll.

## **Conclusion**

This plan establishes a financially responsible, equitable roadmap for the next decade. By dedicating a portion of death certificate revenue toward sustainable forensic development, Idaho can build a modern coroner system that ensures every investigation is conducted with professionalism and scientific integrity. This approach reflects Idaho’s commitment to accountability, efficiency, and public trust.

## **References**

- American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI). (2024). Certification and Standards Guidelines.
- National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME). (2023). Inspection and Accreditation Standards for Medical Examiner and Coroner Offices.
- Idaho Code Title 31, Chapter 28 – County Coroners.
- National Institute of Justice (NIJ). (2023). Every Scene Every Time: A Guide to Death Scene Investigation.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). (2024). Vital Statistics and Death Certificate Fee Reports.

