

**COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO
CALIFORNIA**

For the Agenda of:
June 17, 2008
2:00 PM

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Robert R. Lyons
Coroner

Subject: Report Back – Alternatives For Funding Transportation Of Decedents From
Death Scenes To Coroner’s Facility

Supervisory
District: All

Contact: Greg Wyatt, Assistant Coroner (916) 874-9353

BACKGROUND

On September 11, 2001, your Board approved a plan to convert all Forensic Pathology and Pathology Support services from contracted providers to County staff. These changes were necessary due to our lack of direct control over staffing and ever increasing costs.

On February 8, 2004, I was appointed Coroner and charged with the task of implementing the above plan.

Over the past four years, positions have been created, staff has been hired and classification studies have been completed which created the classifications of Chief Forensic Pathologist, Forensic Pathologist and the Coroner Technician Series, which includes levels I, II, Senior and Supervisors levels.

The Sacramento County Coroner’s Office has utilized the services of J. Morris Company for the transportation of decedents from death scenes to the Coroner’s facility for more than 36 years.

On July 20, 2004, your Board approved execution of the current agreement with J. Morris Company for the term of July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005. The agreement contains a renewal clause that allows the Coroner to extend the agreement annually for four additional years at an annual increase in rates not to exceed 10%.

In year one of the agreement, total payments to J. Morris Co. exceeded \$161,000. For Fiscal Year (FY) 2007/08, we project our total payments to exceed \$241,000 and project these costs to increase to \$280,000 for Fiscal Year 2008/09. During the five year period of the agreement, J. Morris Co. has raised their rates 10% for FY 2005/06, 10% for FY 2006/07, 7% for FY 2007/08 and has requested an increase for FY 2008/09 of 10% for a total aggregate increase of 42% from the original agreement terms.

DISCUSSION

Decedent Transportation Services is the last piece of the cost containment plan from 2001, that remains a contracted service and out of our control.

We believe that we have three alternatives for Decedent Transportation that will have varying financial impacts.

Option 1

Continue to utilize the services of a contracted vendor with recognition that contractor's cost of doing business increases will continue with the Coroner's Office having little control over such increases.

For FY 2008/09, costs are projected at \$280,000 of which \$200,000 remains unfunded in the Coroner's Proposed Budget.

This option also places us at risk of having to absorb this critical service operationally and financially, with only 30 days notice, should the contractor choose to end the agreement.

Option 2

Reduce the number of cases referred to the contractor by using existing Coroner Pathology Support Staff to transport the decedent.

This would require redirecting staff, currently providing direct support to the Forensic Pathologists and will result in autopsy procedures taking longer to complete.

We believe that this option will result in significant delays in the removal of decedents from the scene of death. We anticipate delays in hours not minutes, which could result in not only the visually disturbing public impact previously mentioned, but in a strain on other emergency service providers such as Law Enforcement, EMS and Fire staff, who would be required to remain on the scene until our arrival.

It should be noted that the delays resulting from this option would have a ripple effect on both the criminal justice and public health systems by increasing the time it would take to complete autopsies and the necessary reports for prosecution and public health advisories.

This option also has the distinct possibility that the contractor would abruptly cancel the Transportation Agreement due to the reduction in revenues making his operation no longer financial feasible.

In late FY 2006/07, faced with cost overruns for Laboratory Services, the Coroner's Office attempted to reduce caseloads to the contracted Vendor and completed a portion of the transport caseload, utilizing existing staff and resources. After 30 days, the vendor threatened to cancel services if the caseload did not return to the previous levels. Since Coroner resources were not

available to fully take on this task, this effort was abruptly stopped and transport referrals were returned to the Vendor.

Option 3

Convert all Decedent Transportation Services from a Contracted function to a County Coroner operation.

To implement this option, with minimal impacts to the Pathology and Morgue Operations, would require the addition of 5.0 FTE Coroner Technician staff to augment shift levels to adequate staffing levels to provide Transportation Services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Attached is a Body Transportation Unit Setup Cost Analysis, which includes a Personnel Budget Report, reflecting Salary & Benefit costs for 5.0 FTE Coroner Technician Level I staff and additional operational costs for Vehicle Fuel and Laundry Services Costs. These costs are projected at \$271,340, which is approximately \$8,000 less than our projected contracted costs. This option would also require additional setup costs for a Surplus Van, plus a Van Tray, Cot, Communication Equipment and Staff Uniforms amounting to approximately \$19,307. Total projected 1st year costs for this option are \$290,647 of which \$80,000 is currently funded for Transportation costs.

SUMMARY

We believe that Option 3 is our best option, financially and operationally for both the short term and long term. It would finally complete the plan from 2001 and allow for greater service deliver oversight with the option to introduce additional cost savings advantages where necessary.

We believe that any service level reductions or attempts to reduce the rates for services provided by our existing Contracted Vendor will result in the Vendor abruptly ending the agreement and creating an operational emergency and Public Safety hazard in that the Transportation of Decedents from the death scene will be greatly delayed.

We believe that should we continue to contract for these services, we will be back before your Board, each year, requesting supplemental funding to cover these increasing costs of doing business with significant increases annually.

Respectfully submitted,

ROBERT R. LYONS, CORONER
Department of Coroner

Attachment
Body Transportation Unit Setup Cost Analysis