

Idaho Criminal Justice Commission - Coroner Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

Date: May 15, 2025

Time: 3:00 PM - 4:15 PM

Attendees

- Senator Melissa Wintrow, JLOC Co-chair
- Kelli Brassfield, Idaho Association of Counties
- Ryan Langrill, Office of Performance Evaluations
- Sheriff Bart Quayle, Fremont County
- Matthew Gamette, ISP Forensic Services
- Bernie LaSarte, Coeur d'Alene Tribe
- Will Carson, Twin Falls County Coroner
- Torey Danner, Bannock County Coroner
- Scott Carver, Valley County Coroner (briefly joined but was responding to a plane crash)

Subcommittee Background

- Created by Governor Little as part of the Idaho Criminal Justice Commission
- Formed in response to OPE reports on Idaho's coroner system
- Builds on Senate Bill 1101 (2025) which established basic coroner duties and responsibilities
- Goal is to develop policy recommendations by October/November for the governor's consideration

Key Discussion: Current Coroner System Assessment

Attendees described the current system as:

- **Will Carson (Twin Falls Coroner):** "It makes a difference in what county you die," noting inconsistent services across counties
- **Sheriff Quayle (Fremont County):** Emphasized the tension between constitutional office tradition and funding realities
- **Bernie LaSarte (Coeur d'Alene Tribe):** Noted inconsistencies in standards, resources, and funding
- **Matthew Gamette (ISP Forensic):** Described the system as "ignored" and "under-resourced" but having the right structure for Idaho
- **Torey Danner (Bannock County Coroner):** Called the system "broken and inconsistent" with only 6 full-time coroners statewide
- **Ryan Langrill (OPE):** Noted the system is "fractured and inconsistent" with "high level of risk, chain of custody issues"

Issues Identified for Future Consideration ("Grocery List" Items)

1. **Records confidentiality and privacy policies** (suggested by Senator Wintrow)
 - Need for standardized protocols for storing information
 - Balancing privacy concerns with public transparency
 - Prompted by a constituent case involving inappropriate disclosure of photos
2. **Access to autopsy services** (suggested by Matthew Gamette)
 - Limited regional availability (currently only in Ada County and Spokane, WA)
 - Need for regional facilities across the state, especially in northern Idaho
 - Exploration of ISP forensic services conducting autopsies (suggested by Torey Danner)
3. **Standardized reporting and systems** (suggested by Matthew Gamette)
 - Need for uniform death investigation and reporting standards
 - Improved data systems, sharing, and accessibility
 - Need for computer/technology access for all coroners
4. **Autopsy capacity and requirements** (suggested by Torey Danner)
 - Concern about mandating autopsies without adequate resources
 - Need to evaluate current capacity before expanding requirements
 - Need for regional solutions to spread workload
5. **Eligibility and professional standards** (suggested by Sheriff Quayle)
 - Establishing minimum professional standards
 - Need for training on search and seizure laws and constitutional requirements
 - Challenge of providing funding for required training
6. **Funding for autopsies** (raised by Sheriff Quayle)
 - Counties with small budgets struggle to pay for necessary autopsies
 - External pressure from agencies like NTSB requiring autopsies in certain cases
 - Need for sustainable funding mechanism
7. **State-level organizational home** (suggested by Ryan Langrill)
 - Need for state-level entity to house resources and oversight
 - Identified as necessary foundation for other improvements
8. **First responder status** (suggested by Ryan Langrill)
 - Consideration of designating coroners as first responders
 - Access to mental health resources and workers' compensation for PTSD

Action Items

1. Senator Wintrow to distribute:
 - JLOC study
 - Link to SB 1101 legislation
 - County-by-county resource study
 - Meeting notes and specific preparation prompt for next meeting
2. All members to:
 - Review distributed materials
 - Prepare to discuss "what the coroner system would look like if it was successful 50 years from now"
3. Kelli Brassfield to:

- Continue working to add prosecutor representation to the subcommittee (Matthew Gamette suggested a prosecutor from Blaine County)
 - Add county commissioner representation
 - Develop agenda for next meeting
4. Torey Danner to:
- Prepare to answer questions about current system and SB 1101 implementation rather than giving a formal presentation

Next Meeting

- **Date:** Tuesday, June 3, 2025
- **Time:** 2:30 PM Mountain Time
- **Format:** Zoom