

## **Idaho Criminal Justice Commission - Coroner Subcommittee Meeting Minutes**

**Date:** January 12, 2026

**Location:** Idaho Association of Counties,  
700 W. Washington St., Boise, ID 83701

**Time:** 2:30 PM Mountain Time

**Facilitators:** Senator Melissa Wintrow and Kelli Brassfield (IAC)

### **Subcommittee Members Present:**

- Senator Melissa Wintrow, JLOC Co-chair
- Kelli D. Brassfield, Idaho Association of Counties
- Ryan Langrill, Director, Office of Performance Evaluations
- Sheriff Bart Quayle, Fremont County
- Matthew Gamette, ISP Forensic Services
- Bernie LaSarte, Coeur d'Alene Tribe
- Robert Beers, Bonner County Coroner
- Joshua Hall, Nez Perce County Coroner
- Brett Harding, Ada County Chief Deputy Coroner
- Torey Danner, Bannock County Coroner
- Jimmy Roberts, Bingham County Coroner
- Tara Beard Parsons, Butte County Coroner
- John Fudenberg, Executive Director, IACME
- Robert Bleazard, Ada County Deputy Prosecuting Attorney
- Brent Mendenhall, Madison County Commissioner

### **Subcommittee Members Absent:**

- Kirt Gaston, Bellevue Police Department
- Scott Carver, Valley County Coroner
- Will Carson, Twin Falls County Coroner

### **Action Item – Approval of the minutes from December 16, 2025**

*Bingham County Coroner Jimmy Roberts made a motion to approve the minutes from December 16, 2025; Nez Perce County Coroner Joshua Hall seconded. Motion carried. Matthew Gamette abstained.*

### **Strategic Plan/Charter - Kelli D. Brassfield & Senator Melissa Wintrow**

Kelli Brassfield presented the strategic plan charter, which included objectives derived from an OPE report. Brett Harding suggested that the objectives be addressed in order, starting with enhancing public understanding and confidence, to build support for subsequent funding requests. Brett Harding argued that public understanding of the coroner's role in public health and community safety is crucial before moving to funding, quality improvement, and expanding infrastructure. Brett Harding recommended developing a white paper or "small toolkit" to aid

coroners in explaining their role to elected officials and the community, which Jimmy Roberts and Brett Harding agreed to collaborate on and will provide it to the group.

Robert Beers suggested adding "operations" to the funding and infrastructure objective to cover necessary operational costs beyond just building infrastructure.

### **Possible Legislative Ideas – Kelli D. Brassfield & Senator Melissa Wintrow**

- Death Certificate fee increase
  - Kelli Brassfield then introduced the proposed increase of the death certificate fee, which would add \$2 to be used for autopsy costs. It was questioned if counties are currently refusing autopsies due to funding, expressing concern that the death certificate funds could be quickly exhausted. There was discussion around the concern and that there appears no autopsy has been denied; however, some coroners don't order an autopsy based on the amount of funds budgeted for autopsies.

Kelli Brassfield introduced the new section covering autopsy costs and reimbursement, which is modeled after Washington state law. This is a tiered approach. There was discussion on improving the quality and standard of medical legal death investigations, citing an instance in Blaine County where an autopsy did not guarantee an appropriate investigation. It was emphasized that a forensic pathologist is dependent on the information provided by the medical legal death investigator or coroner, and the office would not conduct a postmortem examination if the investigation were insufficient, as it puts their doctors and conclusions at risk. It was suggested that proper death investigation, including on-scene examinations and photography, should be a qualification for reimbursement.

It was stressed that reimbursement should go directly to the coroner's office fund, not the county general fund, to incentivize coroners to become certified and accredited.

- Required autopsies
  - Kelli Brassfield presented the draft language regarding required autopsies based on national recommendations. A discussion arose regarding whether the language required a forensic autopsy in every listed circumstance, or if it should allow forensic pathologists the latitude to determine necessity. Jimmy Roberts and Brett Harding supported maintaining latitude for elected officials and coroners in making decisions about autopsies, even outside of written protocols, given that cases can be unique and require expert consultation. Kelli will add in language to allow for discretion.

### **Human Remains Draft – Kelli D. Brassfield**

Kelli Brassfield shared draft legislation regarding adjustments to human remains statutes, prompted by issues like grave robbing and the selling of human remains. Jimmy reported receiving feedback, including from a grad student speaking individually, suggesting "tapping the brakes" on the legislation to involve more people. Jimmy noted consensus that selling human remains as collector's items is inappropriate but highlighted a lack of infrastructure in Idaho for collecting, holding, and disposing of confiscated remains.

There was a concern about potential issues with legislation that might lead to arresting retired doctors whose families discover anatomical specimens, many of which may have been acquired historically through means like the "red market" for teaching purposes. It was suggested that an anthropologist should be consulted, noting that having specimens, not necessarily in compliance with the anatomical gifts act, is not uncommon due to past practices of selling remains to institutions.

### **Decedent Photos Draft – Kelli D. Brassfield**

Kelli presented a draft from Rep. Skaug. Senator Wintrow acknowledged the complexity of the new bill compared to their own, simpler draft, which is an exemption in the public records act to prevent sharing photos.

It was suggested running the two bills together or side-by-side to ensure that the basic concerns are addressed, and stressed the importance of positive, constructive feedback. Kelli Brassfield noted concerns that the new draft could prohibit forensic science use and that the suggested 90-day records retention period might be too short for cases involving appeals or those without a statute of limitations. Brett Harding strongly opposed the destruction of records, citing a case where old photos were the only remaining evidence of a potential homicide. Brett Harding argued that destroying photos after a short period could expose offices to civil litigation by removing evidence supporting diagnoses, such as a thrombus in the heart. Bart Quayle agreed, recounting a 1981 murder retrial where scene and deceased photos, retained for almost 20 years, were critical to the case.

It was emphasized the paramount importance of using redacted photos for educational purposes, particularly for teaching coroners and medical investigators, which is currently difficult due to restrictive laws in places like Florida.

### **Other Business – Kelli D. Brassfield & Senator Melissa Wintrow**

- Brent Mendenhall – Update – Moved to the next meeting.
- Bernie LaSarte – Update from classifications from last meeting - Moved to the next meeting.

Subcommittee members are encouraged to provide their feedback on the drafts presented by the end of the week.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm MT.