

20  
23

# Impact Report

LA CROSSE COUNTY MEDICAL  
EXAMINER AND CLERK OF COURTS



Medical Examiner

## CLERK OF CIRCUIT COURTS



Clerk of Courts

**Beth Lubinski, Medical Examiner**  
**Tammy Pedretti, Clerk of Courts**

# Essential Work

## MESSAGE FROM THE MEDICAL EXAMINER



In my first full year as La Crosse County Medical Examiner, I have had the privilege to serve on various committees that have allowed our office to strengthen interagency relationships and work towards improving the health of the community.

In 2023, our case numbers decreased compared to 2022, which continues to trend toward pre-COVID case volumes. Unfortunately, 2023 saw an increase in cases investigated as a result of a large percentage of aging individuals within La Crosse County. The Medical Examiner Office also investigated a record setting 55 drug related deaths in 2023 across the county.

Throughout 2023, our office has been working diligently to ensure the work we provide aids in solving the issues faced by La Crosse County. This is accomplished by continuing to assist and work hand in hand with other agencies of La Crosse County.

Thank you!

### **Beth Lubinski**

La Crosse County Medical Examiner

[elubinski@lacrossecounty.org](mailto:elubinski@lacrossecounty.org)

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

- Investigated a total of 758 cases including 55 drug-related deaths, 19 suicides, 4 homicides, and 8 motor vehicle collisions.
- Hired one new On Call Deputy Medical Examiner, bringing total Deputy Medical Examiner staff to 8.
- Began working on updating County Wide Mass Fatality Plan with a full-scale practice set for the future in 2025.
- Continued involvement in various committees including Suicide Review Team and Overdose Fatality Review Team allowing the department to strengthen interagency relationships and improve the health, safety, and welfare of the county.

# What We Do

- Within the Medical Examiner's office, we perform many tasks, only some of which are commonly known. Our office investigates any type of death that occurs outside a medical facility. This includes natural home deaths, suicides, homicides, motor vehicle accidents, and accidental deaths. When we investigate deaths that occur outside of a medical facility, we are required to report to the scene, provide a thorough investigation, and work alongside law enforcement officials.
- Besides scene calls, our office also is required to investigate any death that occurs within 24 hours of hospital admission, any death at the hospital, nursing home, or home hospice where the decedent experienced a fall within the preceding 6 months. Also, any death that occurs in a medical facility that is not natural is required to be investigated. For these investigations, our presence is not necessary on scene, but rather conversation through phone calls and medical record investigation is performed.
- Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, our office visits local funeral homes in La Crosse County to obtain a photograph with identifying information for decedents who will have a cremation performed. This is also accomplished for any decedent that is leaving La Crosse County by visiting the hospital morgues. After the photograph is obtained, our office signs all cremation permits for La Crosse County which allows the funeral homes to cremate individuals. With assistance of local funeral homes, our office is responsible for investigating the cause of death and signing death certificates.
- If a case meets criteria and an autopsy is warranted, the decedent is transported by our office to Southeast Minnesota Regional Medical Examiner Office in Rochester, Minnesota for a full and complete autopsy. Our office will also obtain toxicology samples even if an autopsy is not performed. Tissue and Eye procurement occurs in our facility through various donation agencies.

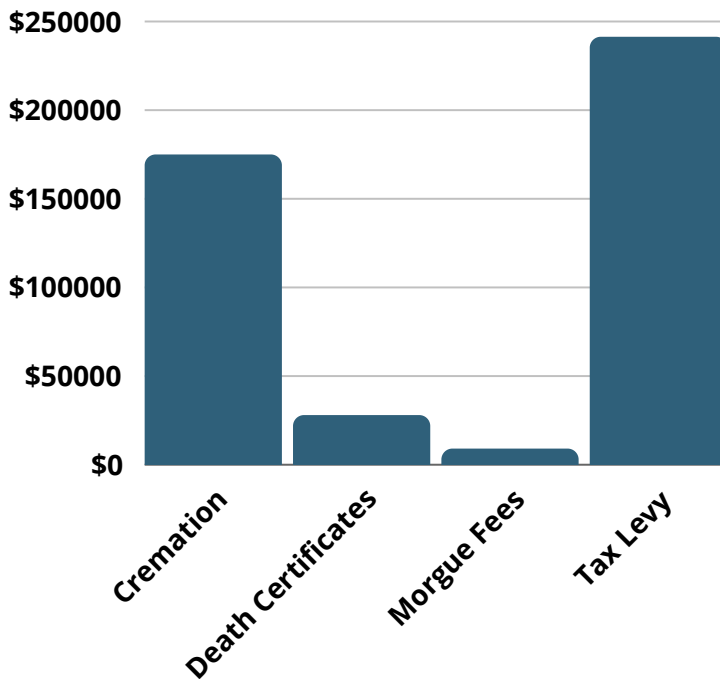
## LOOKING FORWARD

- Continuing to update and creating standard operating guidelines for the department.
- Continuing education training with staff members attending Wisconsin Coroner's & Medical Examiner's Association Conferences being held in June and January along with Minnesota Coroner's and Medical Examiner's conferences being held in April and September. Looking to expand outside of the two primary conferences.
- Potential in-service trainings for various first responder and law enforcement agencies (including reserves) on what the Medical Examiner's Office accomplishes on scene calls and education on the scope of the department.



# 2023 Finances

## REVENUE & EXPENSES

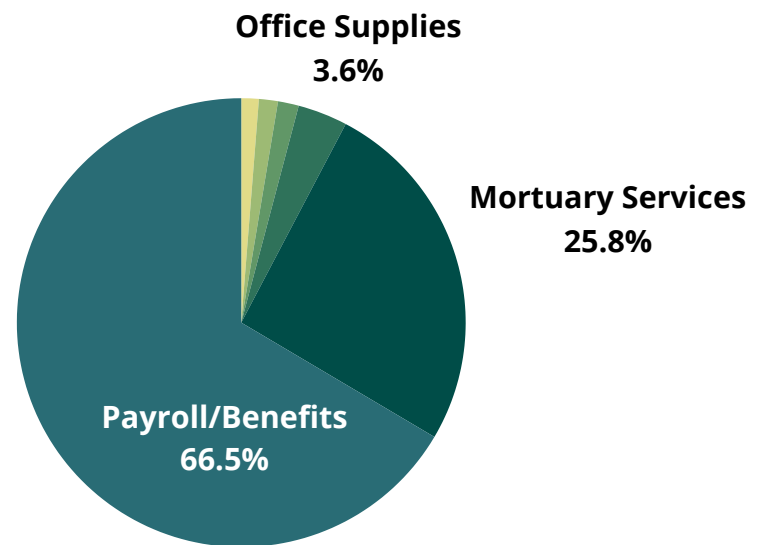


### REVENUE

- Cremation: \$175,000
- Death Certificates: \$28,000
- Morgue Fees/Reports: \$9,100
- Tax Levy: \$241,387
- **TOTAL: \$453,487**

### EXPENSES

- Payroll/Benefits: \$301,537
- Autopsies/Mortuary Services: \$117,000
- Office Supplies/Maintenance: \$16,250
- Lab and Medical Supplies: \$6,800
- Employee Education/Training: \$6,200
- Vehicle Maintenance/Gasoline: \$5,700
- **TOTAL: \$435,487**



# 1093

1093 cremation permits were signed along with 337 death certificates in 2023.

# 758

In 2023, 758 cases were investigated. Including, 55 drug-related deaths, 19 suicides, 4 homicides, and 8 motor vehicle collisions.

# 6

6 in-house tissue and eye procurements were completed in 2023.

# Committed to Excellence

## MESSAGE FROM THE CLERK OF COURTS



The Clerk of Courts Office continues to grow — in knowledge, leadership, and staff. At the beginning of 2023, the number of employees was at an all-time low of just 10 — now, we are fully complimented with a workforce of 16 employees. It has taken over a year to develop the team you will meet today. As of the draft of this report, we are currently at full staff! While our office is growing in knowledge at a seedling stage, we have very knowledgeable clerks to assist those who have embarked on this new journey with the Clerk of Courts Office. Recently, I had the pleasure of working with a few retired Clerks of Courts from other counties who were able to provide valuable information on operations, as well as tips and tricks on how to run an efficient office. They were able to share with me pieces of information that worked well in their offices. They met with each member of my team to get some perspective on office matters, and then collectively reported on what areas seem to be functioning well and where to improve. Overall, the clerks reported that we have a very healthy office environment and a team full of willingness to learn and who are eager to implement office efficiencies. I am proud of my team! They are tenacious, resilient and committed to excellence.

### **Tammy Pedretti**

La Crosse County Clerk of Courts

Tammy.Pedretti@wicourts.gov

## 2023 HIGHLIGHTS

- 20 trials were held last year with 41 trial days, including a two-week homicide trial that ended in a hung jury and is scheduled for a 2 week trial in 2024.
- Judge Huesmann was appointed as Circuit Judge for Branch 3 by Governor Evers and then elected in April 2024.
- The “Appearance Rate Summit” team continued to meet throughout 2023 and will continue its work in 2024. Many goals were set and we are nearing finalization on a few of them. The team got to work on a universal Zoom appearance for intake court. As of April 29, 2024, Branch 1 began implementing the universal Zoom approach.
- In an effort to improve efficiencies and meet expectations of our justice partners and with the assistance of Judge Gonzalez and CCAP, we were able to get additional workstations installed for Deputy Clerks in each courtroom. While one clerk is taking the minutes of each hearing during the intake calendar, the second clerk is able to e-mail minutes to the jail and judicial assistants, among other duties.

# What We Do

- The Clerk of Courts Office is the heartbeat of the judicial system. We provide qualified staff to perform duties within the courtroom to take minutes and to communicate important information to other justice partners, provide administrative staff for each judge and our office.
- Jury Management: ensuring that juror questionnaires are mailed to a pool of jurors in a timely manner, that jurors are educated on the process and what it means to be impartial, as well as ensuring the needs of jurors are met in a compassionate and professional manner.
- Collection of fees and fines, as this is a major revenue stream for the courts; it is also one of the biggest expenditures for the office. To ensure that fees and fines are paid, we allow payment plans, have the ability to intercept state taxes, and utilize State Debt Collection for delinquent accounts.
- Maintain all records for the various circuit court case activities that take place each day in La Crosse County.

## COLLECTION OF FEES AND FINES

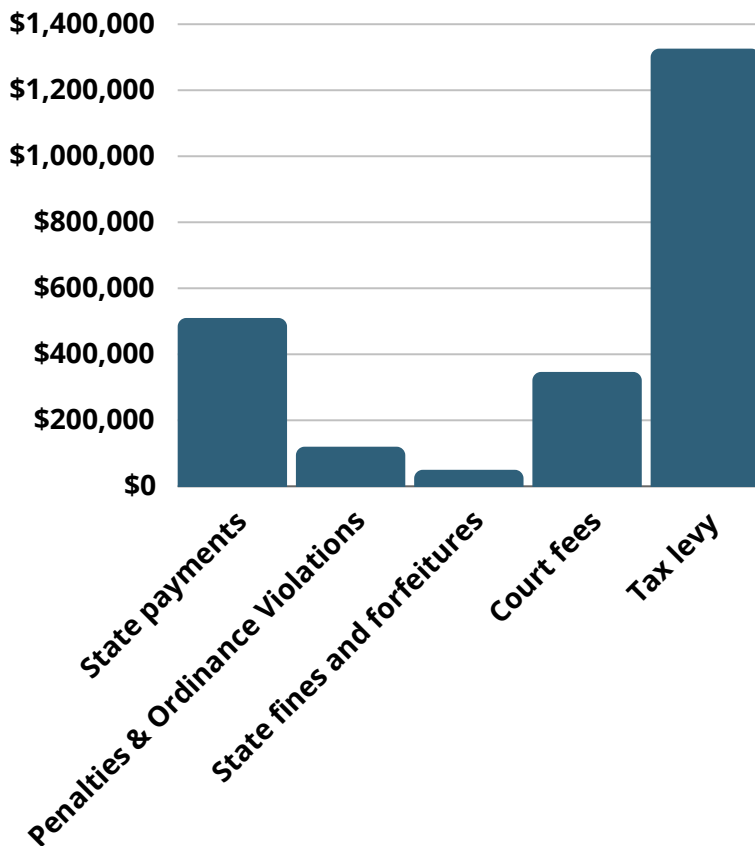
Currently we are doing a deep dive of some very old receivables to collect current address and driver's license information from those that owe fees/fines to La Crosse County. In a recent search, we discovered that many cases had addresses entered into the wrong field on the address screen. Once the addresses were moved to the correct field, we were able to mail notices to initiate collection actions. I run a report each month to determine which cases have outstanding fines due and verify that those cases have the information necessary to send to State Debt Collection if a payment plan or payment has not been made within 30 days of receiving the notice.

## LOOKING FORWARD

- The Appearance Rate Summit Team will continue to work on court hearing reminders by text messages. We are hoping for implementation within the next few months.
- Promote the use of QR code found on our website and within the courthouse to allow court users to update their address and phone number.
- Improve office efficiencies and continue to create, update, and supplement training materials.

# 2023 Finances

## REVENUE & EXPENSES

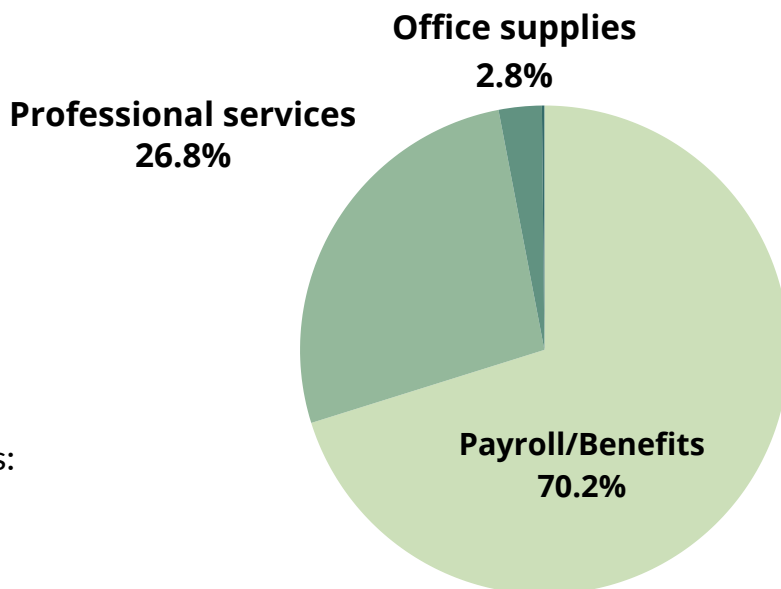


### REVENUE

- State Payments: \$510,000
- Penalties & Ordinance Violations: \$120,000
- State fines and forfeitures: \$50,000
- Court fees: \$346,500
- Tax Levy: \$1,326,044
- **TOTAL: \$2,352,544**

### EXPENSES

- Payroll & Benefits: \$1,650,694
- Professional Services: \$631,000
- Office Supplies/Admin expenses: \$67,000
- Training & Travel: \$3,850
- **TOTAL: \$2,352,544**



La Crosse County invited feedback from court users leaving in-person court from 2/27 – 3/31, 2023.

## 25

25 of 32 court users said that they were treated fairly.

### How could the court help you attend your next court date?

9 votes - allow attendance via Zoon

5 votes - Offer more convenient dates/times

5 votes - Other, assist with transport, sound quality

3 votes - Better explanation of next steps



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