

Coroner/M.E.

PRESENTED BY THE ILLINOIS ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY BOARD MEMBERS AND COMMISSIONERS

Primary Duties

The Office of the Coroner is the oldest administrative office of government. The coroner is responsible for the investigation and certification of cause and manner of death in cases of violence or undue means.

The county coroner is notified when a death warrants investigation and works in conjunction with the police authorities to investigate deaths of a violent nature or unnatural cause (accident, homicide, suicide). When the dead body of a person is found or lying within the county, the coroner will immediately go to the place where the body is and make a preliminary investigation. The coroner's jurisdiction is determined by where the death actually occurs, not where a particular incident/accident happened that might have caused the death. In other words, the jurisdiction lies where the actual pronouncement of death occurs.



The coroner, having viewed the body, will investigate the facts concerning the death. An inquest is a formal hearing into the cause and circumstances of any death resulting from a violence of occurring under conditions which give reason to suspect that the death may have been due to a criminal act or criminal negligence. The hearing is conducted to make a formal determination of the cause and manner of death to allow for further legal proceedings. Although the coroner has the power of subpoena and may compel the attendance of any witness at an Open Inquest, the coroner is not a judicial office and the coroner's verdict is not admissible in civil suit. As soon as the coroner completes the investigation and the cause and manner of death has been determined, he/she files the death certificate with the local registrar (municipal or county clerk), who certifies the record.

Other Responsibilities

The coroner's office is a law enforcement agency and the coroner is a law enforcement official. The coroner serves as the conservator of the peace in his county and has the same powers and is liable to the same penalties as the sheriff. Where the office of the sheriff or under sheriff is vacant, the coroner performs all duties of the sheriff until another qualified sheriff is elected or appointed. The coroner also acts as the warden of the jail in the event the sheriff may be imprisoned in the county jail of his own county.

Training

In most states, including Illinois, the Office of the Coroner is open to lay persons. However, some states require that the coroner be a physician (medical examiner). A medical examiner is an appointed official with necessary qualifications, while a coroner is an elected official with no required qualifications. The Office of the Medical Examiner of Cook County is the only medical examiner system in Illinois and covers half the population of the state. Within 30 days of assuming office, a coroner must apply for admission to the Illinois Law Enforcement Training Standards Board coroners training program. The program must be completed within six months of application. All coroners must complete the training program at least once during their time in office. In addition, every coroner shall attend at least 24 hours of accredited continuing education each year.

Term

Coroner is an elected office serving a four-year term. The office may be eliminated or become appointed by a county-wide referendum or state law.