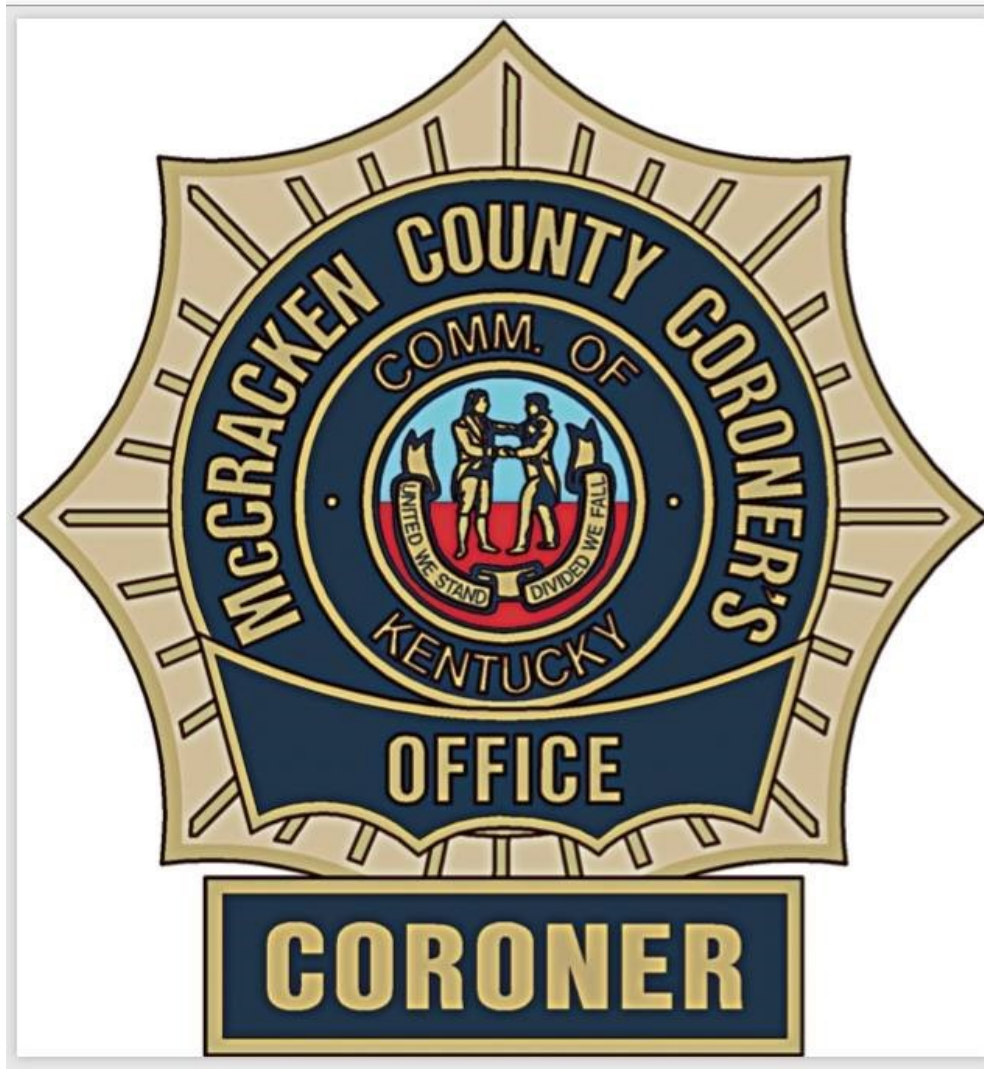


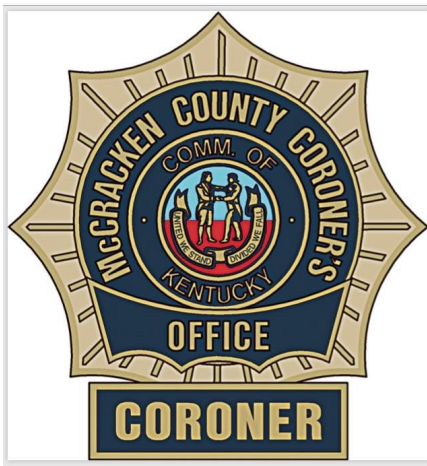
# 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

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AMANDA MELTON, Coroner

*Presented to the McCracken County Fiscal Court  
February 24, 2020*



Coroner, Amanda Melton



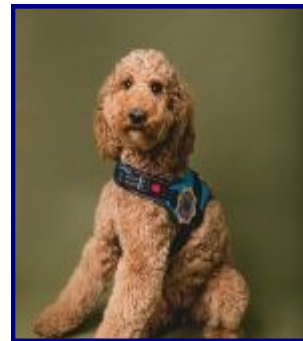
Jason Logsdon



Nick Noland



Jake Blackwell



Special Deputy  
Courtney Hope McCracken



**KENTUCKY  
CORONERS  
ASSOCIATION**



The McCracken County Coroner's Office promptly responds to those scenes which require a post-mortem investigation within the jurisdiction of McCracken County and the City of Paducah. A primary and secondary investigator are on call twenty-four hours a day, 7 days a week.

The Coroner and her deputies function as an on-scene representative of the State Medical Examiner, ensure that Kentucky state law is followed, and serve as an advocate for the deceased person.

The primary responsibilities of Coroner Investigators are to determine cause and manner of death, positively identify the deceased and locate and notify their next of kin.

# **MCCO 2019 Annual Report**

## **General Overview**

### **Calls for service: 1,484**

Number of death investigations: 234

Number of cremation permits issued: 546

Number of hospital case reviews: 170

Number of hospice case reviews: 534

### **Select manner of death statistics:**

Suicide: 21

Accidental overdoses: 18

Motor vehicle collision fatalities: 11

Minors: 8

Drownings: 3

Autopsies: 23

Cases where toxicology was performed: 71

Elder Abuse/neglect: 3

## **Death investigations:**

**234 total**

A death investigation is undertaken in any of the following circumstances as required by KRS 72.025:

- When the death of a human being appears to be caused by homicide or violence;
- When the death of a human being appears to be the result of suicide;
- When the death of a human being appears to be the result of the presence of drugs or poisons in the body;
- When the death of a human being appears to be the result of a motor vehicle accident and the operator of the motor vehicle left the scene of the accident or the body was found in or near a roadway or railroad;
- When the death of a human being occurs while the person is in a state mental institution or mental hospital when there is no previous medical history to explain the death, or while the person is in police custody, a jail or penal institution;
- When the death of a human being occurs in a motor vehicle accident and when an external examination of the body does not reveal a lethal traumatic injury;
- When the death of a human being appears to be the result of a fire or explosion;
- When the death of a child appears to indicate child abuse prior to the death;
- When the manner of death appears to be other than natural;
- When human skeletonized remains are found;
- When post-mortem decomposition of a human corpse exists to the extent that external examination of the corpse cannot rule out injury or where the circumstances of death cannot rule out the commission of a crime;
- When the death of a human being appears to be the result of drowning;
- When the death of an infant appears to be caused by sudden infant death syndrome in that the infant has no previous medical history to explain the death;
- When the death of a human being occurs as a result of an accident;
- When the death of a human being occurs under the age of forty (40) and there is no past medical history to explain the death;
- When the death of a human being occurs at the work site and there is no apparent cause of death such as an injury or when industrial toxics may have contributed to the cause of death;
- When the body is to be cremated and there is no past medical history to explain the death;
- When the death of a human being is sudden and unexplained; and
- When the death of a human being occurs and the decedent is not receiving treatment by a licensed physician and there is no ascertainable medical history to indicate the cause of death.



McCracken County is home to two regional health care facilities (Baptist Health Paducah and Mercy Health-Lourdes Hospital) and multiple skilled care facilities. Because our hospitals and skilled care facilities serve a large rural region, we are disproportionately impacted by deaths which occur in our Emergency Departments. Many people are urgently transported here from surrounding counties. As a result, these deaths occur in jurisdiction and are required to be investigated by our agency.



### **Cremation Authorizations** **546**

Ky. Rev. Stat. § 213.081

(1) No person shall cremate or cause to be transported for the purpose of cremation the body of any person whose death occurs in the Commonwealth, without first obtaining from the coroner of the county in which the death occurred, a permit stating the cause of death and authorizing the cremation or transportation for cremation of the body. The permit shall be filed immediately following cremation with the local registrar of vital statistics.

### **Hospital Case Reviews** **170**

Both hospitals have established protocol which requires their nurse managers/clinical house supervisors to conduct a case review for hospital deaths which have met certain parameters as a means of assuring quality control/risk management. A few examples of cases which are reviewed between the coroner's office and the hospital are those facility deaths which have been admitted for less than twenty-four hours and those whose initial reason for admission may have met one of the conditions listed in KRS 72.025. The hospital review cases may be intercepted at this time and subsequently an investigation may be launched.

### **Hospice Case Reviews** **534**

A registered nurse employed by a health facility as defined in KRS 216B.015, may pronounce death in accordance with the requirements of KRS 446.400. "The nurse shall notify the patient's attending physician or other appropriate practitioner of the death in accordance with the facility's policy. The registered nurse is authorized to sign the provisional report of death as furnished by the state registrar of vital statistics.  
" KRS 314.181 Determination of death by registered nurses – Notification.



Currently, Coroner Melton and Deputy Coroners Logsdon, Blackwell and Noland have successfully completed the required 40-hour Basic Coroner Training class; presented by the Department of Criminal Justice Training Division. The course includes basic investigative training, as well as fire death, scene photography, crime scene pathology/toxicology, case interviews, officer administration, drug-related death, media relations and more. Once registered with the State of Kentucky, our investigators are allowed to officially certify death by authenticating death certificates with the Office of Vital Statistics (Section 1. KRS 213.076), access secure channels of communication with various government agencies (Department of Criminal Justice, Homeland Security), and submit cases for review with the Kentucky Office of Medical Examiners.

Additionally, Coroner Melton has completed training in these areas:

#### **NamUS Training-**

##### **NamUS resources recently helped us solve a missing person's case from 2018.**

NamUs is a national information clearinghouse and resource center for missing, unidentified, and unclaimed person cases across the United States. Funded and administered by the National Institute of Justice and managed through a cooperative agreement with the UNT Health Science Center in Fort Worth, Texas, all NamUs resources are provided at no cost to law enforcement, medical examiners, coroners, allied forensic professionals, and family members of missing persons.

#### **Earthquake Response and Recovery Training-**

AKA "Shaken Fury": The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate supports the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Strategic Plan and its vision of a prepared and resilient nation. "Shaken Fury" is an exercise which simulates the response and recovery to a 7.7 magnitude earthquake scenario. The county's proximity to the New Madrid fault requires ongoing training and diligence to prepare for this natural disaster scenario.

#### **Mass Fatality Training-**

Coroner Melton has been accepted to represent Western Kentucky on the statewide Mass Fatality team and will receive additional training with the team throughout the year. Specifically, she will serve in the Victim's Information Col-

## **PREVENTION/ADVOCACY**



**PREVENTION**

### **Child Fatality Review-**

A diverse group of community professionals has been amassed by Coroner Melton to serve on the Child Fatality Review team as required by KRS 211.686. An extensive review of the death of any minor child whose death occurred in McCracken County or is a resident of McCracken County but whose death occurred out of jurisdiction is assessed by this team of professionals. In most circumstances, the Child Fatality Review State Coordinator and the regional Medical Examiner attend these meetings as well. Issues identified at these meetings may prompt a need for more extensive prevention/advocacy efforts. The need for a "Safe Sleep" campaign originated from the CFR team meeting. The team members are: Amanda Melton-Coroner, Tara Markey-CFR District Coordinator, Jeremy Jeffrey-EMS Director, Heather Anderson-Homeless Education Coordinator, Gretchen Roof-Vice President, Four Rivers Behavioral Health, Samantha Powell & Ellen Walsh,-Prevention Specialists, Four Rivers Behavioral Health, Julie Holmes- Department for Community Based Services, Jason Hicks- Detective, Paducah Police Department, Kyle Seratt- Detective, McCracken County Sheriff's Department, Gretchen Morgan- Community Resource Office, Paducah Police Department, Jessie Meisner-APRN, Four Rivers Internal Medicine, and Dr. Dr. Elizabeth McGregor, Four Rivers Internal Medicine. We will review 8 cases at our next meeting, Tuesday, February 25, 2020.

### **Safe Sleep Campaign-**

The "Safe Sleep" campaign has been developed by the Coroner's office as a result of the rise in preventable positional/traumatic asphyxiation deaths involving infants in McCracken County. Simply put, infants should: sleep alone (with no bumpers, blankets or toys), on the back, in a crib and away from cigarette smoke. This campaign is being presented by the Coroner's office at various health fairs and events.

### **Harm Reduction-**

A small group of representatives from various agencies who meet to discuss possible grants/community outreach opportunities which may be beneficial to our populace.

### **ASAP-**

The Kentucky Agency for Substance Abuse Policy is a large team of area professionals who represent many sectors within our community. The "elected official" sector was fulfilled by Coroner Melton, which ultimately enables this group to apply for and increases their chance of being awarded more grants. This team meets monthly to discuss unhealthy trends and patterns which are being noticed in our community.

### **FREE Narcan Training-**

Friday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, a community event will be held at the McCracken County Public Library in which training will be provided in the correct administration of Narcan. Each participant will receive a free Narcan kit as well as Fentanyl testing strips. McCracken County Coroner's Office is a co-sponsor as well as Four Rivers Behavioral Health, Purchase Area





## OUTREACH/EDUCATION

Along with regular duties relating to deaths and death investigations the office--when possible-- participates in community outreach and education. In 2019, these included:

McCracken County Public Library: "Case Closed Death Investigations 101"  
Sheriff's Citizens Academy Presentation  
Various civic organizations

Courtney Hope McCracken, the "County Comfort Canine", continues her program of training and mission of compassionate outreach. So far, she has completed basic obedience training and will soon embark on her Canine Good Citizen training followed by actual training as a therapy dog. Her mission is *to provide affection, comfort and support to people in hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes, schools, libraries, hospices and/or disaster areas*. Upon certification as a therapy dog, Courtney will be eligible to obtain \$500,000 in liability insurance. Community donors have offset all expenses which might be incurred for her care, training, grooming, and monthly preventatives.

### **Records Management-**

After extensive review of several cloud based record management systems, a new software program called "Coroner Case Management" has been implemented into our department in April, 2019. This software allows us to better track data and trends. In addition, we will be able to extract specific data from individual cases over defined periods of time.

### **Narcotics Disposal-**

A program by which to catalogue and eventually safely dispose of seized narcotics has recently been implemented with the assistance of George Johnson, Evidence Technician MCSO and the McCracken County Attorney's Office.

## FUTURE ISSUES



### **Secure Morgue Space-**

The coroner's office continues to need dedicated private and secure space in which to examine, photograph and safely house decedents under our care. Currently, no such space exists, requiring us to rely on the generosity of Lourdes Hospital or various area funeral homes. Unfortunately, we cannot re-enter those spaces without the assistance of a representative from the hospital or funeral home, thus creating several obstacles including sufficient chain-of-custody oversight.

### **Opioid Crisis-**

The opioid crisis is an ongoing issue with statewide projections on the rise. A cluster of overdose deaths in a short span of time recently occurred in our region, which has the capacity to severely impact resources and manpower.