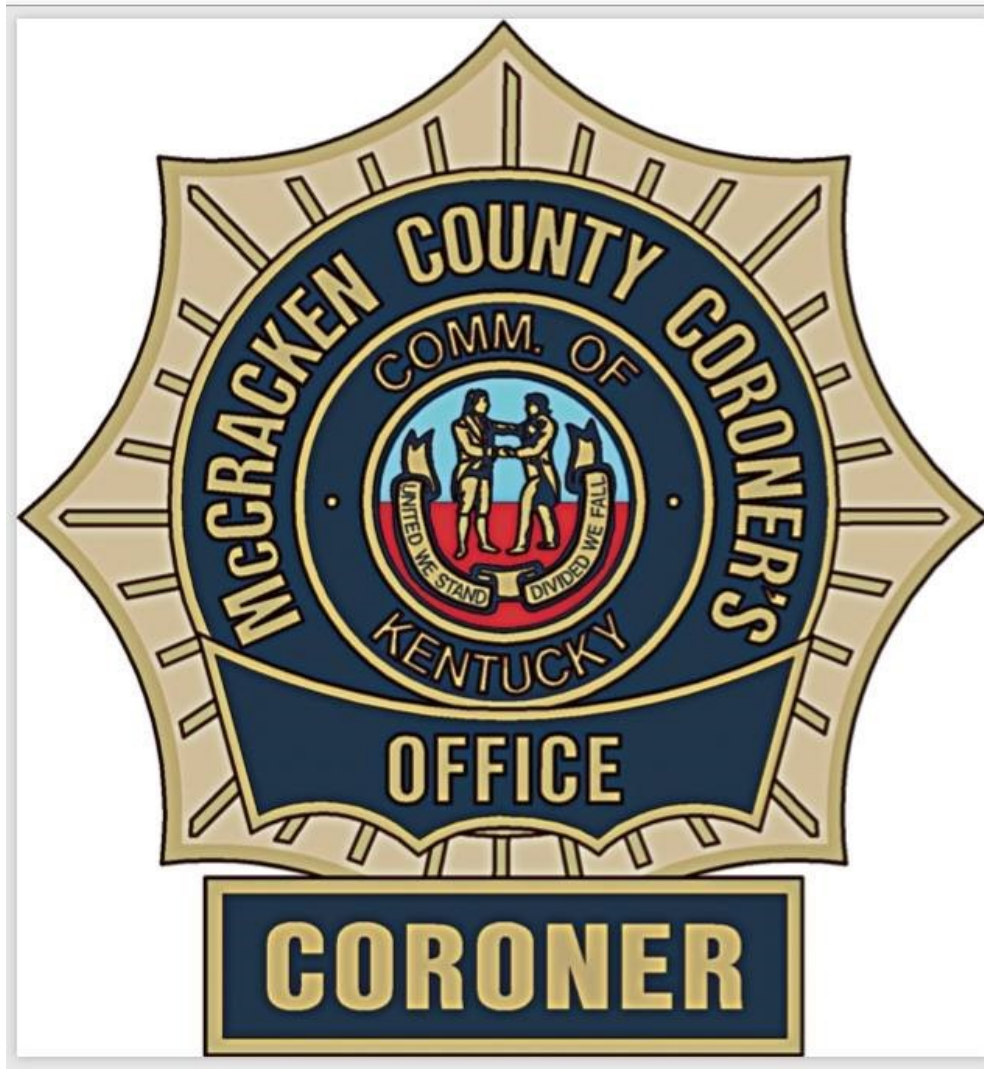


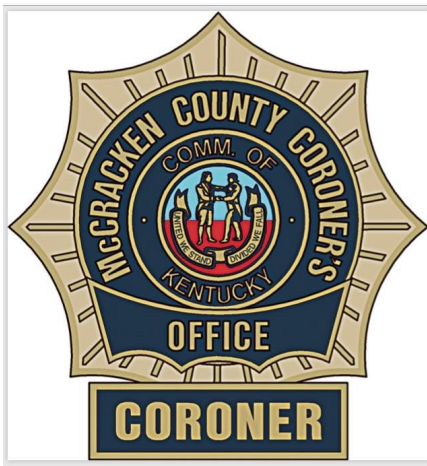
2020 ANNUAL REPORT



AMANDA MELTON, Coroner

Presented to the McCracken County Fiscal Court

April 26, 2021



Coroner, Amanda Melton



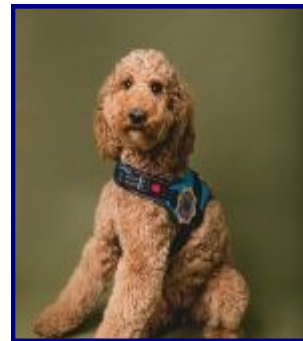
Jason Logsdon



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 the on-scene death investigator for 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 confirm the identity of the decedent, and locate and notify their next of kin. Additionally, the Coroner serves as the liaison between police agencies, family, and the funeral home.

MCCO 2020 Annual Report

General Overview

Calls for service: 1577

Death investigations: 278 (+44)

Cremation permits issued: 616

Hospital case reviews: 218

Hospice case reviews: 440

Death Notifications (courtesy): 3

Court Orders: 7

Indigent financial assistance: 15

Unclaimed/Next of kin location assistance:

Death investigations:

278 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.

Targeted death statistics:

Suicide: 21

Accidental overdoses: 19

Homicides: 6

Motor vehicle collision fatalities: 8

Minors: 6

Drownings: 2

Autopsies: 25

Cases where toxicology was performed: 48

Elder Abuse/neglect: 0

Pending further investigation: 0

Undetermined: 1

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 **616**

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 **218**

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 **440**

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.

Temporary Morgue Preparedness

The initial stages of the Covid-19 crisis showed data that each community of a certain size should prepare for an increased death rate which could quickly overwhelm the resources of hospitals and funeral homes.

The McCracken County Coroner's Office, in coordination with both regional hospitals, area funeral homes, the McCracken County Fiscal Court and other relevant agencies, was tasked with securing and adapting additional space which could be used as a secure morgue location. Within a matter of a few days, a location had been determined with protocol and staffing in place to provide immediate assistance if the need arose.

This undisclosed location was secure, private, and spacious. At the same time we are grateful that this space was not needed, we are equally thankful for those who saw and anticipated the need as well as supported our endeavor and quickly stepped in to help meet our needs.



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.

Due to the unusual circumstances of 2020, the training requirements for coroners/deputy coroners was greatly reduced. All training was online in-services conducted by the Department of Criminal Justice Training for the purpose of meeting the adjusted CE requirements.

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, Cynthia Turner-Prevention Specialists, Four Rivers Behavioral Health, Julie Holmes-Department for Community Based Services, Chelsea Breakfield- Detective, Paducah Police Department, Kyle Seratt- Detective, McCracken County Sheriff's Department, Gretchen Morgan- Community Resource Office, Paducah Police Department, Jessie Meiser-APRN, Four Rivers Internal Medicine, Grace Stewart-Attorney, Lotus, and Dr. Elizabeth McGregor, Four Rivers Internal Medicine. **The team reviewed 7 new cases at our in-person meeting on April 14, 2021.**

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. There is an advisory team who is tasked with developing a video to use for education/awareness.

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.



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 Emergency Management and Disaster Services
Sheriff's Citizens Academy Presentation
WKCTC Criminal Justice Class (Gary Reese)
Leadership Paducah Class (Sandra Wilson)

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 Archive Storage-

An intern with McCracken County High School was allowed to participate in a school-sanctioned mentorship program with the Coroner's Office. The primary task assigned to the student (Ben Schofield) was a reorganization of the records archive room. Ben aspires to seek a career in medicine and is strongly considering a forensic specialty.

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. Fentanyl, as well as designer drugs, continue to present themselves as potentially lethal and are more commonly being used in conjunction with other drugs which are showing increased usage, such as Gabapentin.