

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Hon. Melissa Mark-Viverito  
Speaker of the Council

Hon. Corey Johnson  
Chair, Committee on Health



## Hearing on the Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Budget & the Fiscal 2014 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Office of the Chief Medical Examiner

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## Office of Chief Medical Examiner Overview

The Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) is responsible for investigating deaths resulting from criminal violence, accident or suicide; that occur suddenly, when in apparent good health; when unattended by a physician; in custody; or occurring in any suspicious or unusual manner. The Office also investigates deaths where an application for cremation is made. The Office provides additional forensic services, including DNA testing, to support criminal investigations. The Office also manages all functions of the City mortuary, including the retrieval and processing of deceased bodies; assistance with autopsies; and body preparation for City burial. Structurally, the OCME is housed within the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH).

This report provides a review of the Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Budget for the OCME. The first section presents a financial summary, including the highlights of the Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Budget and the Fiscal 2014 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report.

### OCME Financial Summary

	2012	2013	2014	2014	2015	*Difference
<i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	Actual	Actual	Adopted	Prelim. Plan	Prelim. Plan	2014 -2015
<b>Spending</b>						
Personal Services	\$43,906	\$44,427	\$42,255	\$44,690	\$43,331	\$1,076
Other Than Personal Services	17,043	20,379	14,541	23,296	15,703	1,162
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$60,949</b>	<b>\$64,806</b>	<b>\$56,796</b>	<b>\$67,986</b>	<b>\$59,033</b>	<b>\$2,238</b>
<b>Funding</b>						
City Funds			\$56,422	\$56,899	\$56,827	\$404
Federal – CD			0	0	0	0
Federal- Other			368	9,655	2,202	1,833
Intra City			0	0	0	0
Other Categorical			0	25	0	0
State			5	1,407	5	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$60,949</b>	<b>\$64,806</b>	<b>\$56,796</b>	<b>\$67,986</b>	<b>\$59,033</b>	<b>\$2,238</b>
<b>Headcount (full-time salaried, civilian)</b>	582	622	619	656	626	7

\*The difference of Fiscal 2014 Adopted compared to Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Plan funding.

The Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Budget for the OCME reflects a \$2.2 million increase when compared to the budget at adoption. This increase is mostly attributed to an increase in federal funding for the OCME, which totals approximately \$1.8 million in backlog reduction and research grants for Fiscal 2015.

## Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Plan Actions

- **Funding for WTC Repository.** The OCME proposes increased spending of \$477,000 in City funds in Fiscal 2014 and \$368,000 in Fiscal 2015 and in the outyears for equipment and supplies for the OCME Family Room and Repository at the September 11th Memorial and Museum, which is scheduled to open in April 2014. This funding will also cover four criminalists who will act as liaisons to family members of the victims.
- **Receipt of Federal Grants.** The OCME will receive \$1.8 million in additional federal funds in Fiscal 2015 for the DNA backlog reduction program, research opportunities, the Coverdell program and the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI). Below is a description of the purpose of these funds.
  - The Forensic DNA Backlog Reduction Program. The DNA Backlog Reduction Program assists eligible states and units of local government to process, record, screen, and analyze forensic DNA and/or DNA database samples and increase the capacity of public forensic DNA and DNA database laboratories to process more DNA samples.
  - The Paul Coverdell Forensic Science Improvement Grants Program. The Coverdell program awards grants to states and units of local government to help improve the quality and timeliness of forensic science and medical examiner services. Funds may be used to eliminate a backlog in the analysis of forensic evidence and to train and employ forensic laboratory personnel, as needed, to eliminate such a backlog, as well as other functions.
  - The Urban Areas Security Initiative. The UASI addresses the unique planning, organization, equipment, training, and exercise needs of high-threat, high-density urban areas, and assists them in building an enhanced and sustainable capacity to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to, and recover from acts of terrorism.

## Financial Analysis

As stated in the Office Overview, the OCME performs two main functions – forensic pathology (identifying cause of death and related services) and forensic biology (DNA testing). OCME is given a mandate by the State to function as the City’s mortuary and is responsible for performing all tasks related to that role – mainly, forensic pathology. In 2007, the City expanded the OCME’s testing portfolio (and consequently, caseload) from testing homicides and sexual assaults to also include testing for all property crimes, attempted homicides and felony assaults.

Within the larger context of the DOHMH budget, OCME funding comprises slightly less than five percent of the \$1.34 billion DOHMH Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Budget. The medical examiner’s full-time staff of 626 budgeted positions represents nearly 11 percent of the DOHMH’s total Fiscal 2015 proposed headcount.

Over the past few years, the OCME has sought to diversify its funding portfolio and better protect itself against cuts in City and State funding by aggressively pursuing federal grants and other outside funding opportunities. These efforts, illustrated in the chart on Appendix A, have played a crucial role in helping the OCME to maintain its headcount.

City-Tax Levy (CTL) funds account for nearly all of OCME’s spending, with federal funds accounting for nearly five percent OCME’s budget. These particular funds are typically allocated to the agency in the form of a conditional/categorical grant and can only be used for a specific purpose, as directed by the federal government. State aid accounts for less than three percent of the OCME’s revenue, with funds allocated to the City via the State’s public health local assistance provision.

Traditionally, OCME’s spending is split three to one between PS and OTPS expenses, at 73 percent and 27 percent, respectively. Given the breadth of services covered by the OCME, it’s no surprise that it tends to spend more on personnel than other City agencies.

## Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

As mandated by New York City Charter, the Mayor reports to the public and the City Council twice yearly on the performance of municipal agencies in delivering services. The Preliminary Mayor's Management Report (PMMR) covers performance for the first four months of the fiscal year, from July through October. The annual Mayor's Management Report (MMR) covers the twelve-month fiscal year period, from July through June. Below are performance indicators for the OCME.

	FY11 Actual	FY12 Actual	FY13 Actual	Target FY 14	4-Month Actual FY14
Median time for MLI scene arrivals (hours)	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.7	1.8
Median time to complete autopsy reports (days)	61.5	69.5	50.0	51.0	50.2
Median time to process cremation requests (hours)	1.2	1.3	2.1	1.5	3.2
Median time to complete toxicology cases (days)	40.5	60.0	55.0	28.0	23.0
Median time to complete toxicology sexual assault cases (days)	21.0	30.5	27.0	17.0	32.0
Median time to complete toxicology DUI cases (days)	16.0	15.0	14.0	10.0	19.0
Median days to complete analysis of a DNA case	83.0	88.0	138.0	75.0	121.0
Median time to complete DNA homicide cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	114.0	111.0	161.0	90.0	127.0
Median time to complete DNA property crime cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	65.0	68.0	139.0	70.0	97.0
Median time to complete DNA sexual assault cases, from evidence submission to report (days)	27.0	46.0	89.0	50.0	69.0
DNA matches with profiles in database	1,629	1,791	1,618	*	730

In the first four months of the year, the OCME has performed well in achieving its goals with exceptions in turnaround time for toxicology reports and some areas of DNA services, the latter attributable to attrition and lengthy recruitment and training periods for new hires. Forensic Biology, working with OCME Human Resources, OCME Legal, and the Law Department, initiated an effort in Fiscal 2013 to reduce attrition of newly trained entry level criminalists at OCME.

Below are some performance indicators:

- There was an eight percent rise in cremation request investigations in the first four months, but the time to complete them rose from two to three hours. OCME attributed this to the introduction of a new case management system for this area, and expects improvement once that is fully implemented.
- OCME reduced its time to complete homicide DNA cases by 20 percent to 127 days, when compared to 156 days during the first four months of Fiscal 2013, as DNA services staff worked with the new director and management team. Most backlogged work was completed, which OCME expected to allow it to institute a flow-through process for this DNA work, replacing the batching system that contributed to past delays.



## Appendix A

### Budget Actions in the November and Preliminary Plans

<i>Dollars in Thousands</i>	FY 2014			FY 2015		
	City	Non-City	Total	City	Non-City	Total
<b>Agency Budget as of Adopted 2014 Plan</b>	<b>\$56,422</b>	<b>\$374</b>	<b>\$56,796</b>	<b>\$56,459</b>	<b>\$35</b>	<b>\$56,494</b>
<b>New Needs</b>						
OCME WTC Repository	\$477	\$0	477	\$368	\$0	368
<b>TOTAL, New Needs</b>	<b>\$477</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$477</b>	<b>\$368</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$368</b>
<b>Other Adjustments</b>						
Aid to Lab - Toxicology	\$0	\$65	\$65	\$0	\$0	\$0
Decrease funds from accruals	0	(155)	(155)	0	0	0
Domestic Preparedness Equipment Support	0	2,488	2,488	0	0	0
FEMA Sandy - Buildings and Equipment	0	121	121	0	0	0
Forensic DNA Backlog Grant Adjustment	0	(36)	(36)	0	0	0
Forensic DNA Backlog Reduction Grant	0	1,226	1,226	0	988	988
Forensic Research & Cold Case Adjustment	0	(103)	(103)	0	0	0
Health Research Inc.	0	25	25	0	0	0
Justice Assistance Grant Funds	0	70	70	0	0	0
Local Government Records Mgmt.	0	68	68	0	0	0
National Inst. of Justice Research	0	1,413	1,413	0	156	126
OCME DNA Lab	0	1,244	1,244	0	0	0
OCME Toxicology Lab	0	90	90	0	0	0
Paul Coverdell Forensic Sciences Grant	0	118	118	0	57	57
Research Evaluation Development Program Grant	0	83	83	0	0	0
Solving Cold Cases - OTPS	0	90	90	0	0	0
Urban Areas Security Initiative	0	3,908	3,908	0	1,000	1,000
<b>TOTAL, Other Adjustments</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$10,713</b>	<b>\$10,713</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$2,171</b>	<b>\$2,171</b>
<b>TOTAL, All Changes</b>	<b>\$477</b>	<b>\$10,713</b>	<b>\$11,190</b>	<b>\$368</b>	<b>\$2,171</b>	<b>\$2,539</b>
<b>Agency Budget as of Preliminary 2015 Plan</b>	<b>\$56,899</b>	<b>\$11,087</b>	<b>\$67,986</b>	<b>\$56,827</b>	<b>\$2,207</b>	<b>\$59,033</b>