



# ANNUAL REPORT 2022

**Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner**

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## **Executive Summary**

In September of 2022, the County of Delaware hired new leadership to advance the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) forward with the goals of acquiring accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME), revamping policy and procedures and work with the county in preparing for an updated facility over the next couple of years. Jeffrey Lange, Administrator for the Office of the Medical Examiner, developed a plan of action so that the department could reasonably achieve these stringent goals while continuing to provide an essential service to the citizens of Delaware County.

There are three phases to accomplish the goal of receiving accreditation from the National Association of Medical Examiners. First, the development of policy and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that align with National Association of Medical Examiners accreditation standards and other best practices across the country. Second, the project management of a new facility. In order to achieve accreditation, the facility must be within standards set forth by the National Association of Medical Examiners. These facility standards include security, administrative space, safety, maintenance, and the autopsy suite. The third phase will be the recruitment and the hiring of a Chief Medical Examiner. This position must be a physician who has been granted by the American Board of Pathology or an accreditation equivalent.

In 2022, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner had received 5,693 reported deaths (jurisdiction accepted and terminated cases) that were investigated by five (5) full-time and one (.5) part-time forensic investigator. That equates to 1035.09 investigations each or 3.98 cases a day or 19.90 cases a week. (These figures are based on the investigator working 5 days a week). This is an extremely high case load to handle. In November, we were approved to move the part-time investigator to a full-time position, and we hired two additional full-time forensic investigators bringing our full-time investigators to seven.

In 2022, DCOME personnel also processed 3133 cremation permits, conducted 584 autopsy examinations, and processed 1,152 pieces of evidence.

Compared to 2021, the DCOME received 6249 reported deaths, processed 3351 cremation permits, and conducted 680 autopsy examinations. Some of 2021 reflected COVID-19-rated cases.

## **Introduction**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) is proud to present our 2022 Annual Report. The DCOME Annual Report provides specific information about deaths occurring in Delaware County during the 2022 calendar year and investigated by the DCOME. This information is a valuable resource for Delaware County citizens and leaders to identify trends in preventable deaths, which can be used to protect the lives of all Delaware County citizens through education and changes in public policy. The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner is one of three counties that operate under a Medical Examiner System in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The other system in the Commonwealth is a Coroner System. A coroner is sometimes an elected official that may or may not have any professional medical background and can certify a death certificate. In the Medical Examiner's Office system, a physician (Pathologist) can only certify a death certificate.

Not every death in Delaware County must be reported to or investigated by the Medical Examiner. The patient's primary care physician acknowledges the great majority of natural deaths which are not reported to the Office of the Medical Examiner.

According to Pennsylvania Revised Statutes, certain deaths must be reported to the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) by anyone with knowledge of the decedent. Forensic Investigators will conduct a preliminary investigation after receiving a report of death to ascertain whether the circumstances comply with the law. In this case, the DCOME is given control over the medical death investigation and is in charge of confirming the medical cause and manner of death on the Death Certificate. By law, a body that is to be cremated must first be approved by the Office of the Medical Examiner in the county where the death occurred. A cremation investigation involves follow-up with the pathologist's reports for the cause and manner, if applicable, and verification of the location of death as reported by the funeral director.

## **Mission, Vision and Core Values**

### **Mission**

The Mission of the medical examiner is to conduct expert medicolegal investigations into deaths that occur under statutorily prescribed circumstances. The findings of these investigations are then independently shared with members of the public and relevant agencies to improve public safety and health.

### **Vision**

By having licensed practitioners and professionally trained staff who conduct medicolegal investigations and adhere to industry standards in a setting that is striving for industry accreditation, we aspire to establish ourselves as a trustworthy source of accurate, scientifically supported assessments of deaths in our community.

### **Core Values**

**Service** – The highest value that we uphold is service. We pledge to provide efficient, uplifting, moral, and compassionate service to the general public and to one another.

**Integrity** - We commit to conduct ourselves in a respectful and professional manner at all times when interacting with the people we serve and with one another. We commit to doing our best to be sincere, moral, and diligent. We commit to taking responsibility for our own words and deeds and to developing an organization that upholds integrity by demanding the same of others. When no one is looking, we still act morally.

**Compassion** - We agree to practice empathy for one another and the people we serve, as well as to be aware of the potential negative effects of our words and deeds on others. We understand that speaking openly and kindly, even in the midst of disagreement, is an act of compassion.

**Positivity** - We understand that perspective is important to attitude and that accurate assessments do not need to be pessimistic. We promise to face obstacles with a constructive mindset.

**Adaptability** - We understand that nothing remains the same. We pledge to look for the good in change and recognize that it presents an opportunity for development.

**Teamwork** - We understand how crucial it is to collaborate with people outside of our department and other department members; everyone on the team has a part to play. We strive to foster a positive, cooperative, service- and solution-oriented culture.

**Boundaries** - We understand that there are boundaries within which we must talk, act, and for our team to succeed, each member must put their all into playing their part. We pledge to work within the parameters of our responsibilities while being careful not to take on inappropriate roles or to criticize or undermine those in other jobs.

## **Legal Authority**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner fulfills a core function mandated by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's for each of the counties.

Act 154, Section 1218-B, states,

(A) Duty. The Coroner (Medical Examiner) having a view of the body shall investigate the facts and circumstances concerning a death that appears to have happened within the county, notwithstanding where the cause of the death may have occurred, for the purpose of determining whether or not an autopsy or inquest should be conducted in the following cases:

- (1) A sudden death not caused by a readily recognizable disease or, if the cause of death cannot be properly certified, by a physician on the basis of prior recent medical attendance.
- (2) A death occurring under suspicious circumstances, including if alcohol, a drug or another toxic substance may have had a direct bearing on the outcome.
- (3) A death occurring as a result of violence or trauma, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal or accidental, including, but not limited to, a death due to mechanical, thermal, chemical, electrical or radiational injury, drowning, cave-in or subsidence.
- (4) A death in which trauma, chemical injury, drug overdose or reaction to a drug or medication or medical treatment was a primary or secondary, direct or indirect, contributory, aggravating or precipitating cause of death.
- (5) A perioperative death in which the death is not readily explainable on the basis of prior disease.
- (6) A death in which the body is unidentified or unclaimed.
- (7) A death known or suspected to be due to contagious disease and constituting a public hazard.
- (8) A death occurring in prison or a penal institution or while in the custody of the police.
- (9) A death of an individual whose body is to be cremated, buried at sea or otherwise disposed of so as to be unavailable for examination thereafter.
- (10) A sudden and unexplained infant death.
- (11) A stillbirth.

(B) Purpose. The purpose of an investigation under subsection (a) shall be to determine:

- (1) The cause and manner of the death.
- (2) Whether or not there is sufficient reason for the coroner to believe that the death may have resulted from a criminal act or criminal neglect of a person other than the deceased.

(C) Requirements. As part of an investigation under subsection (a), the coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the deceased.

## **Organization of the Office of the Medical Examiner**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) is divided into Departmental Sections based on the following services:

**Administration and Administration Support-** Provide leadership and overall direction of the Department. Administrative support is comprised of business support, reception, scheduling, records management, data entry, and validation for electronic death certificates. This section also includes a Bereavement Coordinator who serves as a family advocate to assist bereaved family members in interacting with DCOME.

**Morgue Operations-** Forensic Pathologists who are physician staff trained and Board Certified in the medical subspecialty of forensic pathology. They make jurisdictional case decisions, conduct postmortem examinations, certify deaths, review records and results, formulate medical conclusions, and author DCOME's final work product, the Medical Examiner Report. This section also includes a Forensic Odontologist, who is Board Certified, providing forensic specialist expertise in identifications.

Autopsy Technicians provide technical support for the examination of bodies admitted to DCOME's facility, assist with performing radiographs, taking photographs, and aiding in autopsy dissections. Additional duties include fingerprinting and photography.

**Forensic Investigations-** Led by the Chief of Forensic Investigations, who is certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) for Medicolegal Death Investigations who leads the team to conduct interviews, collect evidence and photograph the scene and body, evaluate scenes, and gather records and histories. They are the eyes and ears of the Medical Examiners and are most often the face of the agency, interacting with other agency partners and the public.

**Evidence-** The Evidence Technician is responsible for assisting and administering security, distribution, maintenance, and inventory of all collected evidence. The Evidence Tech safeguards the chain of custody of all evidence.

# **Staff Professional Growth**

## **Quarterly Reviews-**

All employees must attend a quarterly review with their immediate supervisor to review their performance and assess additional training if needed. This feedback session focuses on professional growth for the individual employee. Each employee will have a review to identify certifications that may be required, such as American Board Death Medicolegal Investigator and other professional certificates in their respective fields. If the employee lacks different areas of their job duties, a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) can be initiated to get the employee back on track.

## **Employee Recognition-**

A new program for the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner will focus on employee recognition. This will be awarded quarterly to those employees that have shown initiative or championed change, improvements to the quality of work operations, improved safety programs, provided guidance and coaching sessions with new employees, and generally went above and beyond their regular work duties.

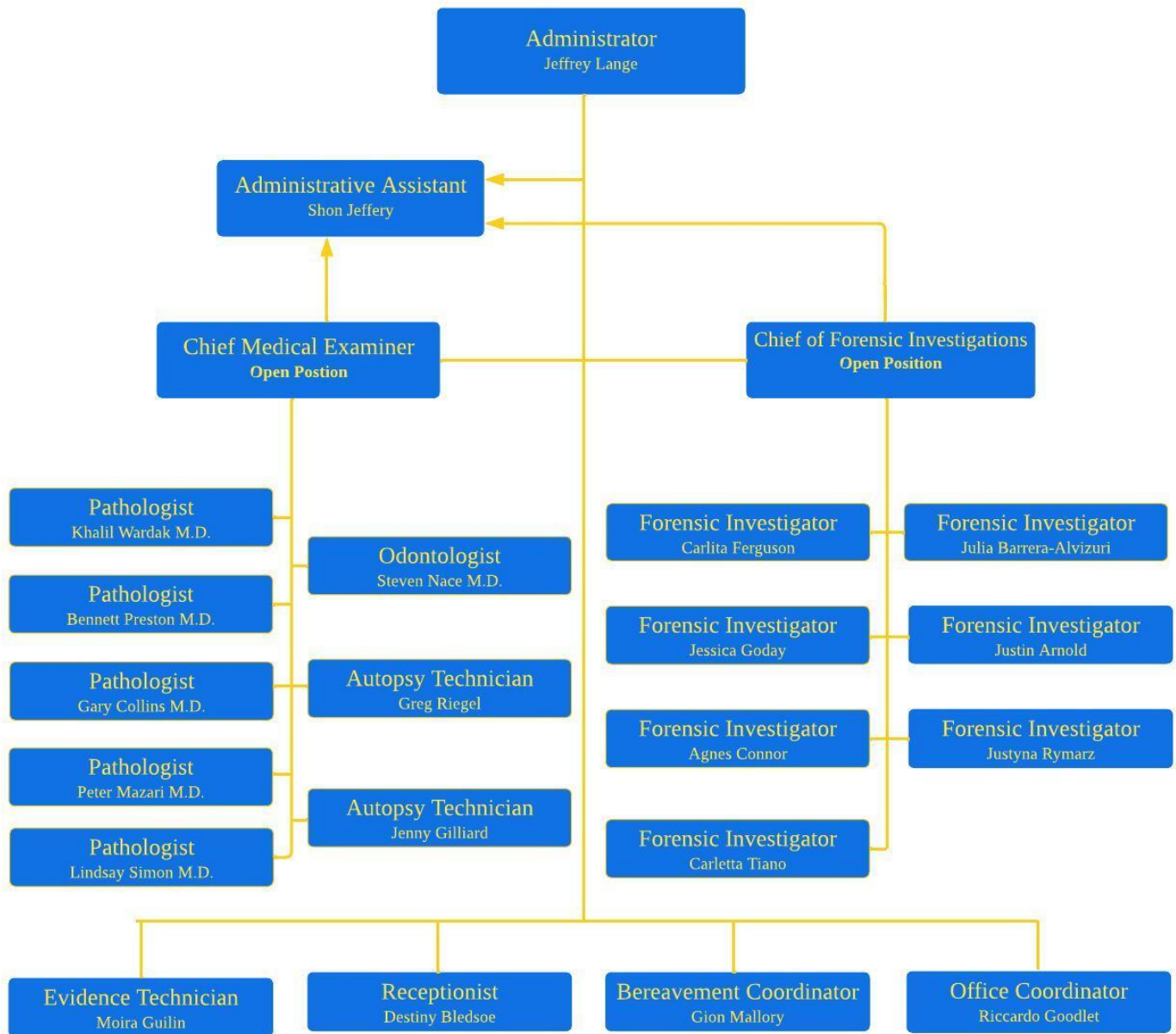
## **Training-**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner has developed an intensive training program for all employees. There is mandatory training and a variety of elective-style classes/courses that fit within each employee's job category. These are broken down into Forensic Investigations, Morgue Operations (Autopsy Techs and Pathologists), evidence management, and general administrative functions. The employee has access to 20 plus elective-style classes and must choose a number of these per year. Certifications such as CPR, fire extinguisher operations, blood-borne pathogens, and harassment-type classes are some examples of annual mandatory training. Specific courses, such as FEMA Incident Command System (ICS), will be required within the first year of all new hires.

## **Mental Health-**

Working in the Medical Examiner field can be exhausting physically and mentally. Management is committed to the well-being of each employee's mental health status. A weekly "peer support" newsletter is sent to all employees with links and contact information for coping with stress and other mental health and emotional well-being counseling services.

# Organizational Chart



## Contracted Transportation Services Provided by

- Warren Baskerville
- Preston Griffin
- Donald Rollerson

## **Budget, Capital and Grant Funded Projects**

- The operating budget for the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner in 2022 was \$2,011,116.00, and most of these funds were spent in the Morgue Operations Division. Pathology examinations, cost of salary for the physicians, scientific testing (toxicology), and supplies are just a small sample of expenses in the morgue. The DCOME operates very similarly to healthcare practices.

- Capital Funded Purchases

- Stryker Power Loads (2)
- Stryker Pro Stretchers (2)

The Delaware County Medical Examiner's Office purchased four stretchers to outfit our existing fleet of trucks. The Stryker stretchers are a powered unit allowing our staff to pick up and transport decedents utilizing our fleet. This powered unit is safer and lowers risk factors for possible injury when lifting standard and oversized decedents -Cost of the Stryker units- \$206,304.63.



- Mortuary Mall- Cadaver Lift

The Delaware County Medical Examiner's Office purchased a much-needed cadaver lift for our refrigeration/freezer units. Inside these units, a three-tiered rack is in place, where our staff could not utilize the top section, and only if the decedent was light in weight would the lower rack be utilized. The scissor lift assists the staff in placing and retrieving the decedents without risk of injury. Cost of the equipment- \$6,364.95.

- Grant Funded Equipment

- VertiQ Case Management System

The Delaware County Medical Examiner's Office purchased, with grant funding, a case management system to replace an outdated system. The new case management system, called Moon, allows staff to manage a case throughout its various stages of investigation. This includes investigative reports, autopsy and pathology reports, toxicology and lab results, evidence and property management, intake and release of decedents to funeral homes/cremation centers, and supervisor reviews. Grant-funded purchase cost- \$75,000.00.

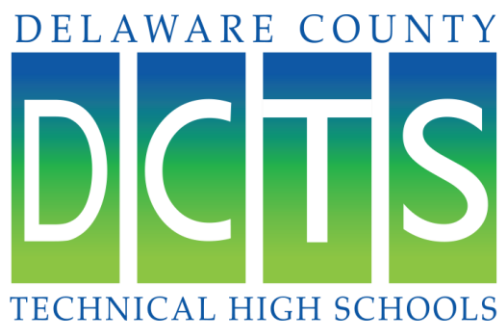
## **Professional Partnerships**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner entered into a paid work agreement with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Public Health, Office of Drug Surveillance and Misuse Prevention. This work agreement generates \$10,000 for the County's general fund per year. The DCOME is required to provide drug related statistical data twice a year. This is a multi-year work agreement between the agencies.

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner DCOME has partnered with the Delaware County Technical School allowing high school juniors and seniors that are enrolled in the medical career classes the opportunity to view adult autopsies as part of their teaching program.



Students from the Delaware County Technical School with Dr. Wardak





The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner also has partnered with the Delaware County Health Department for death reviews. The initial partnership was established in November of 2022 and will provide insight not only on child reviews but expanding this service to suicides, overdose deaths and possibly motor vehicle accidents resulting in death.

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner (DCOME) has partnered with the Pennsylvania Institute of Technology (PIT), allowing students enrolled in the Licensed Practical Nursing program the opportunity to perform and have hand on experiences / clinical rotations three days a week working alongside our pathologists. DCOME and PIT will continue to provide other opportunities including the development of the first autopsy certification course for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.



The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner has reestablished the partnership with Gift of Life. Gift of Life coordinates the recovery of organs and tissues for transplant. The complex organ and tissue donation and transplant process involves collaborating with highly skilled medical and investigative professionals at many different levels. Working in partnership with healthcare teams,

investigative teams, and other medical professionals, Gift of Life provides extensive and compassionate services to help ensure every opportunity for donation and transplantation.

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner reestablished our continued professional working relationships with many other organizations such as the Delaware County Police Chiefs Association, the Delaware County 911 Center, Delaware County Emergency Management, the Delaware Emergency Management, and the Delaware County Regional EMS Office and the various funeral and cremation services in Delaware and surrounding counties.

## **Data-Sharing Collaboration**

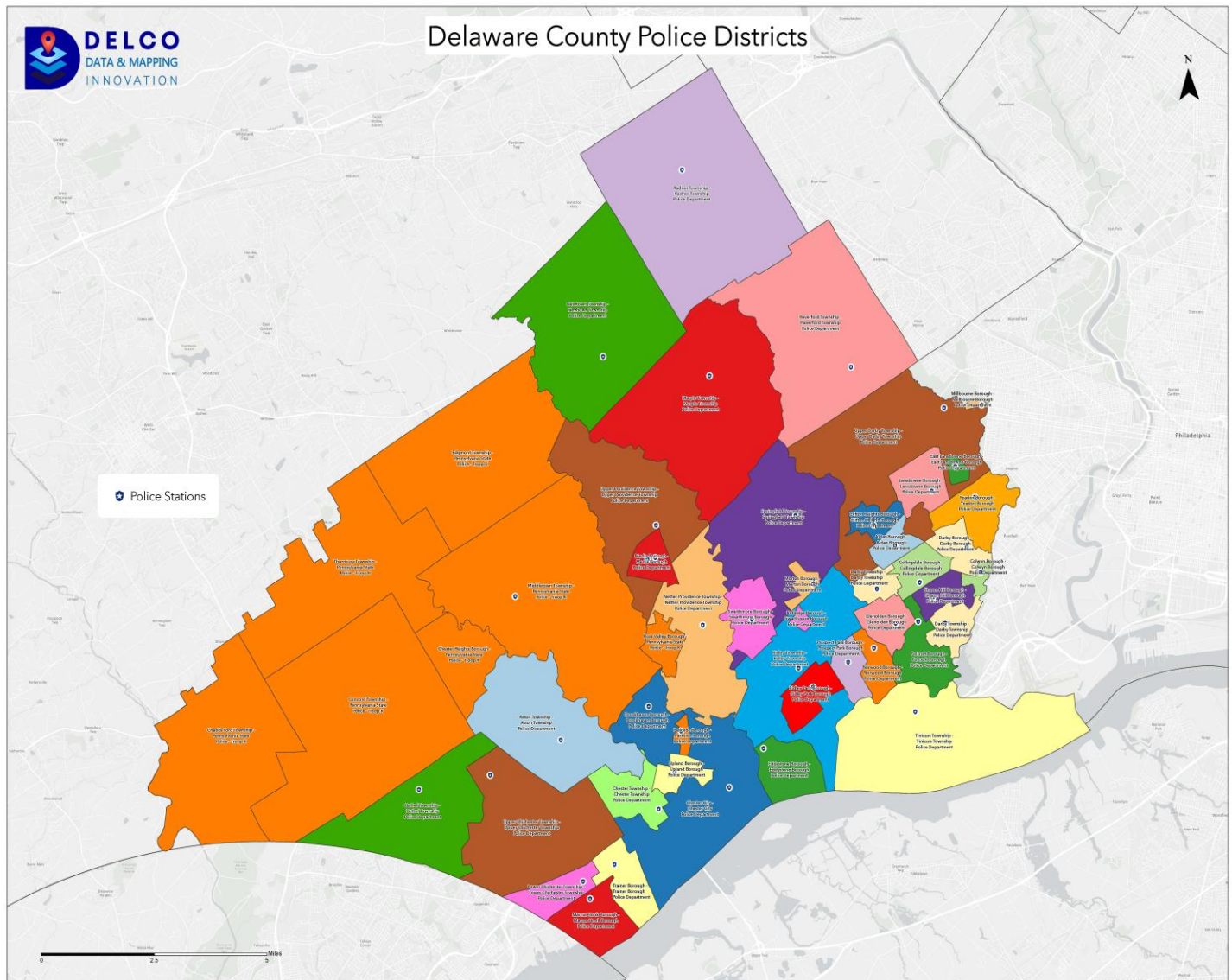
As mentioned, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner shares statistical data with various governmental organizations in the County and the Commonwealth, along with non-government /civic organizations. This information comes in the form of drug-related deaths, firearms-related deaths, suicides, and infant deaths, to name a few. The importance of these partnerships allows for better decision-making based on factual data to assist in the development of prevention and outreach efforts, improvement safety plans, adjustment service delivery, and development/update policy.



## Jurisdictions we Support

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner provides support to 50 jurisdictions in Delaware County and works with 42 Police Agencies, the State Police, the Delaware County District Attorney's Office and Criminal Investigative Division (CID).

The Delaware County also services seven hospital systems and other various nursing home systems in Delaware County.



## **Community Involvement**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner participated or assisted in community-sponsored events in Delaware County. The first was assisting in preparing the National Faith and Blue Weekend event sponsored by the Second Baptist Church of Media, the Delaware County Sheriff's Office, and the Delaware County Park Police.

The second event was at the Delaware County Technical School (DCTS), serving as the Skills USA competition judge. DCTS requested Administrator Jeff Lange to serve as one of the judges in Crime Scene Investigations testing.

## **Future Opportunities for 2023**

The Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner's Office (DCOME) plans to conduct community outreach programs to educate the public, hospitals, hospice agencies, and nursing homes on the mandatory reporting of deaths. DCOME will also provide awareness training to any Delaware County law enforcement agency, EMS, and fire departments.

Other outreach areas will include participating in mass disaster planning with the Emergency Management of Delaware County and assisting community partners in preparing for mass fatality events.

DCOME's Bereavement Coordinator will enhance the missing person notification process and increase our capabilities to identify unknown individuals. Enhancements will be through technology advancements, working with the community and law enforcement to identify our unidentified decedents.

We are in the process of developing an anonymous drop box for missing persons in several county areas and on social media. This would allow individuals wary of law enforcement agencies to freely drop off a comment-size card of a missing person's description.

## Bereavement Resources

### Sincere Words

We encourage you to attend grief counseling and support groups. This time is very difficult and challenging, and there is no timeline for grieving. It is essential to understand that gradually in your own time, you can begin to find some solace in what has happened.

### Our Services

Delaware County gives its deepest condolences to you and your loved ones during this sensitive time of grief. When ready, the Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner offers you and your family resources and guidance. Our Bereavement Coordinator, Ms. Gion Mallory, can provide specific programs and agencies to assist you further and ease your transition during this time of need. Please do not hesitate to contact her at 484-750-2150.

### *Grief and Bereavement Support Groups*

#### Children Impacted by Grief

- *Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout (YEAH)*  
267-469-3002

[YEAHPhilly – Reaching Philly Teens the Right Way](#)

- *Urban Youth Leadership Academy*  
215-204-8917
- *Uplift Center for Grieving Children*  
267-437-3123

[Uplift Philly – Uplift Center for Grieving Children](#)



#### Outpatient Agencies in Delaware County

- *Holcomb Behavioral Services*  
126 E. Baltimore Pike, Media, PA

Hotline number 484-444-0412 can gain general information

Website-[www.chimes.org/about/chimes-family/Holcomb-behavioral-health-systems/](http://www.chimes.org/about/chimes-family/Holcomb-behavioral-health-systems/)

Call to schedule intake appointment for services to begin. Fees might apply office does take select providers

- *Thrive Works Counseling*  
Hotline 610-808-9923  
Website [www.thriveworks.com/media-counseling/](http://www.thriveworks.com/media-counseling/) you can find information, fees, providers offered. Call to schedule intake appointment for services to begin.  
Fees might apply office does take select providers
- *Family and Community Service*  
600 N. Olive Street, Media PA  
610-566-7540
- *Glen Mills Counseling Center*  
485 Baltimore Pike, Suite 201,  
Glen Mills PA  
Or  
210 W. Front St. Media PA  
610-656-1424

### **National Suicide Prevention Hotline**

- *1-800-273-TALK*  
24-hour hotline, if you or someone you know is considering an act of suicide, experiencing trauma caused by losing a loved one to suicide
- *Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital Crisis Center*  
610-237-4210
- *Survivors of Suicide, Inc*  
215-545-2242  
[www.sosphilly.org](http://www.sosphilly.org)
- *Crozer Chester Mental Health Crisis Center* 610-447-7600
- *Healthy Minds (Phila. BHIDS)*  
215-685-6444 (24/7)  
<https://healthymindsphilly.org/>
- *NAMI Bucks County PA*  
215-343-3055  
<http://namibuckspa.org/>
- *Center for Grief and Bereavement*  
610-222-4110  
<http://bereavementcenter.org/>

### **Suicide Resources (Trained Persons to Help)**

- *Greater Philadelphia*  
610-649-5250
- Prevent Suicide PA- Delaware County Task Force  
[Delaware County - Prevent Suicide PA](#)
- *Delco Suicide Prevention Org*  
[delcosuicideprevention.org](http://delcosuicideprevention.org)
- *Delaware County Crisis Connection*  
855-889-7827  
24/7 emergency aid

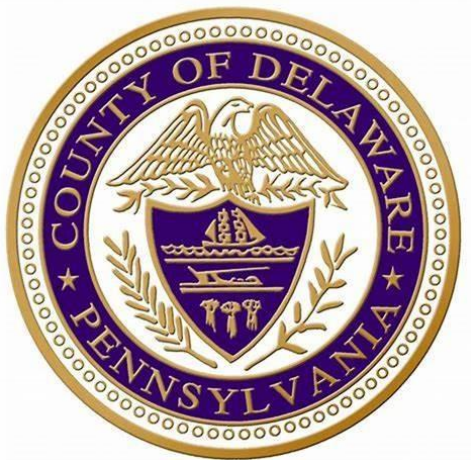


### **Support Groups for Families impacted by Homicide**

- *Victim's Compensation Program*  
24hour hotline- 610-566-4342  
Possible re-imbursement of expensive. Funeral arrangements, medical bills, etc. Victims Assistance Advocate appointed; attend court appearances, compensation status
- *Parents of Murdered Children*  
484-557-1370
- *Mothers in Charge*  
215-228-1718
- *Operation Save our City*  
856-745-6045
- *Healing Hurt People*  
215-762-1177
- *Court Financial Services*  
610-891-5060
- *Network of Neighbors Responding to Violence*  
267-233-4387
- *AVP's hotline of murder victims*  
215-686-8033

### **Delaware County Mental Health Services**

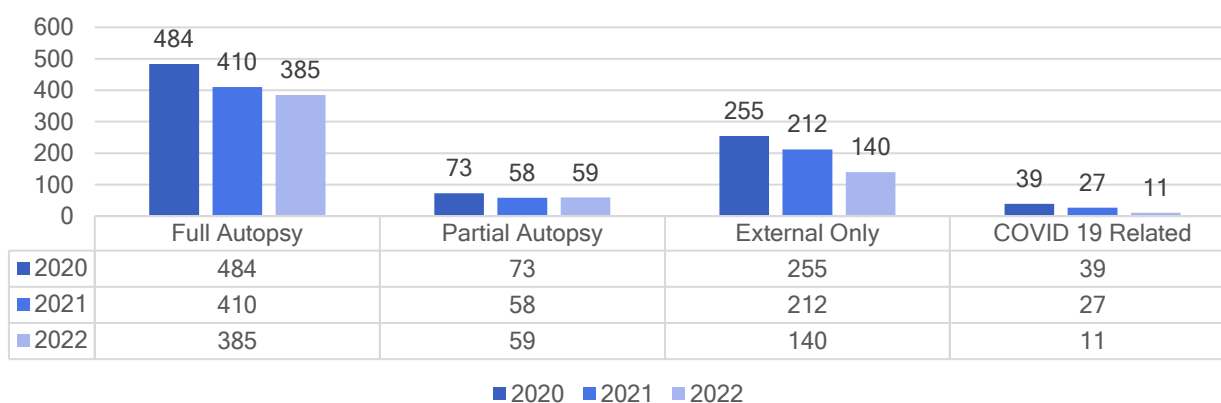
- Mental Health Office  
20 S. 69<sup>th</sup> Street, Upper Darby, PA 19082  
610-713-2365



## 2022 Delaware County Statistics

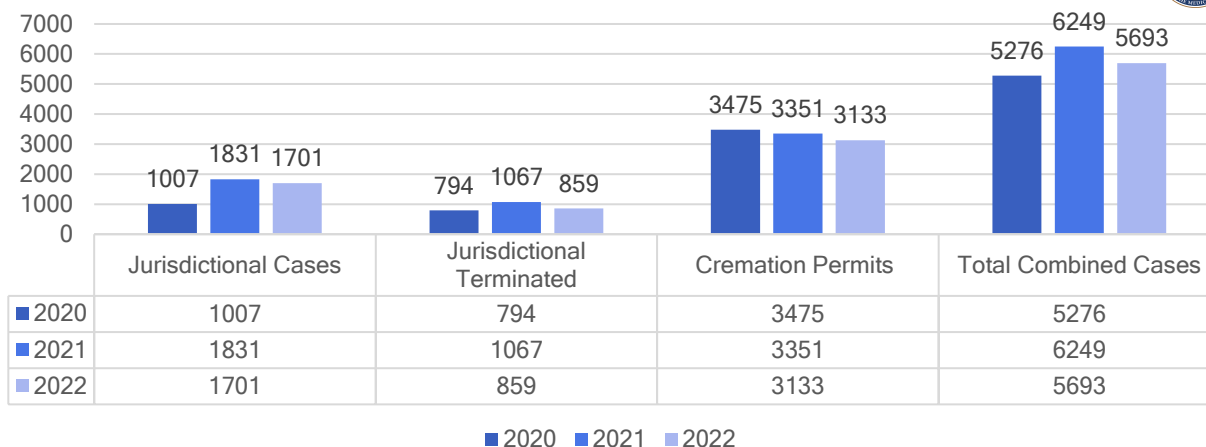
It is important to recognize that each statistic in this report represents the loss of human life, leaving bereaved family and friends behind. We hope, as always, that understanding the trends in our community can assist policymakers, public health officials, and the systems of healthcare and public safety as they work to improve our lives.

### Delaware County Types of Examinations



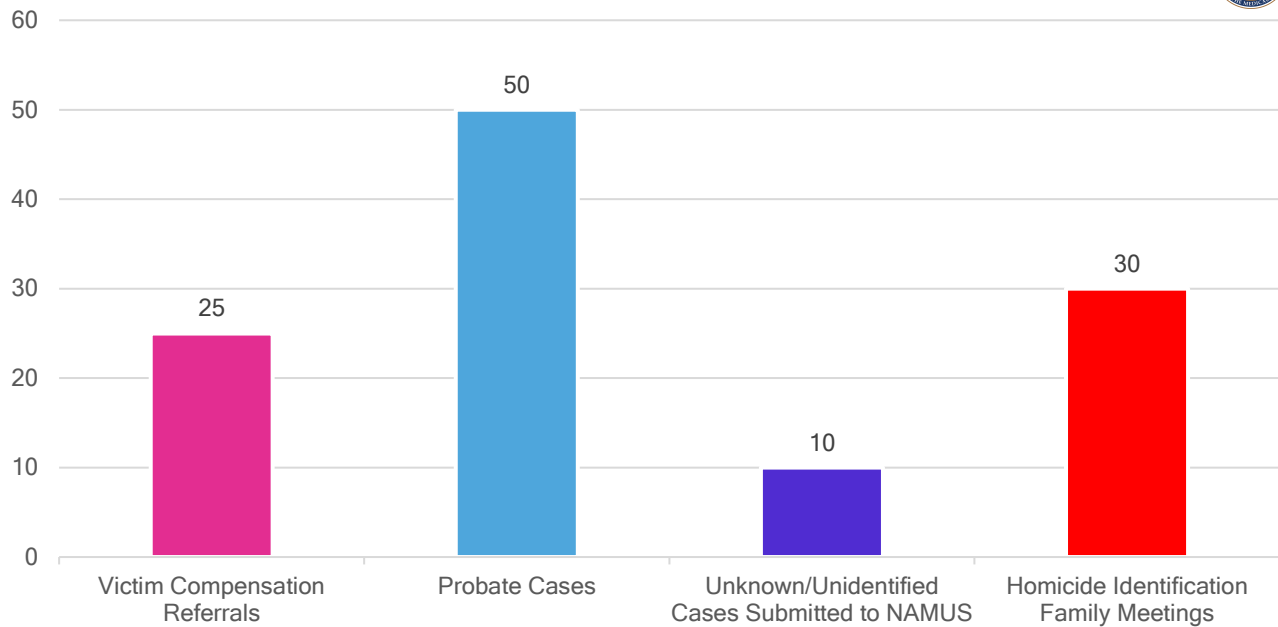
Covid 19 related cases are only those that were reported to the DCOME.

### Delaware County Total Cases Investigated



Both Jurisdictional and Terminated cases are all investigated along with a review of the cremation permits requests.

## Delaware County Bereavement Coordinator Efforts

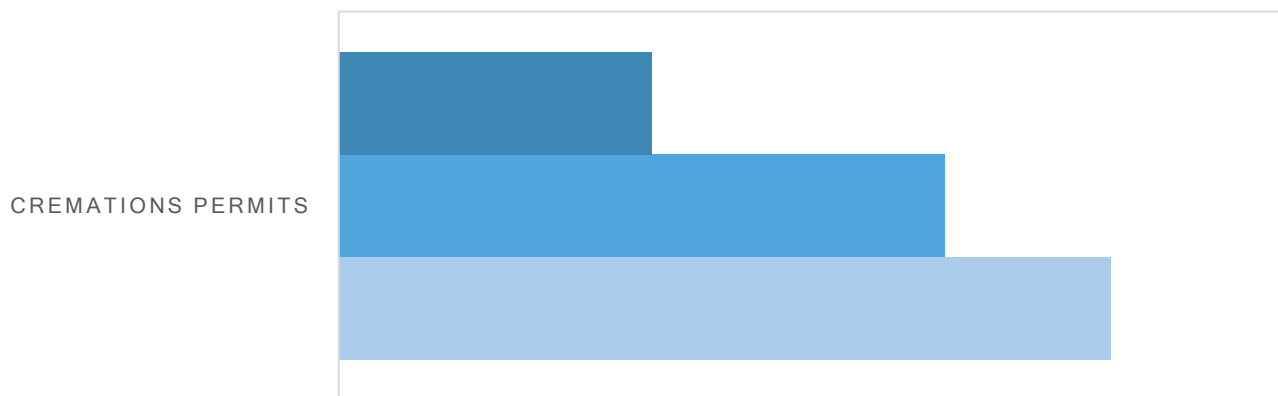


Bereavement Coordinator efforts since April 2022

## Delaware County Cremation Permits

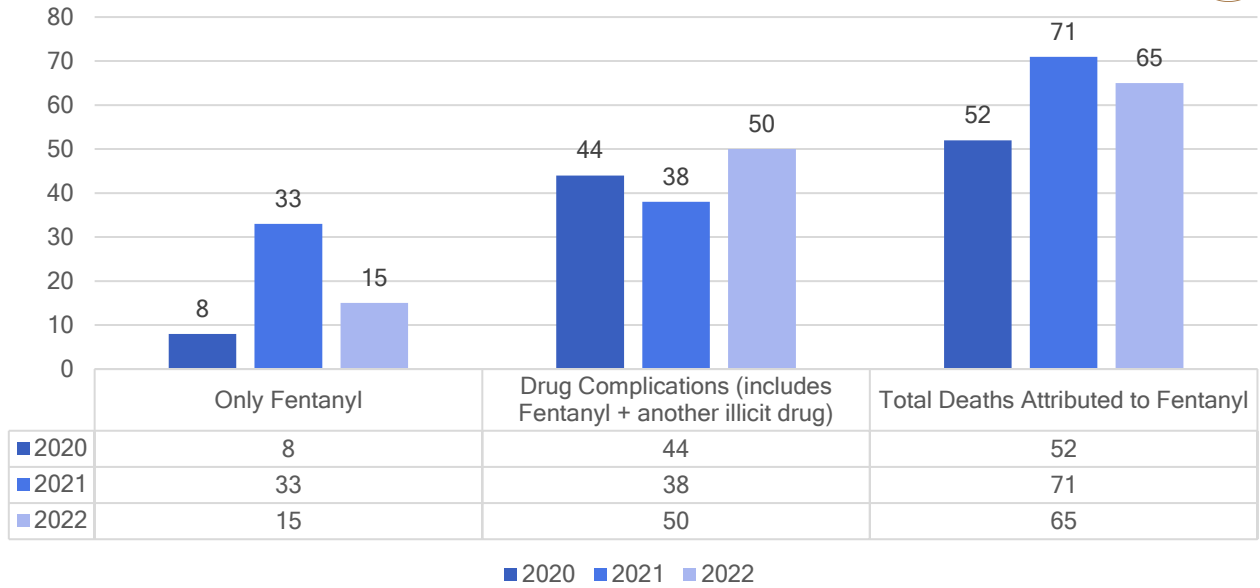


■ 2022 ■ 2021 ■ 2020



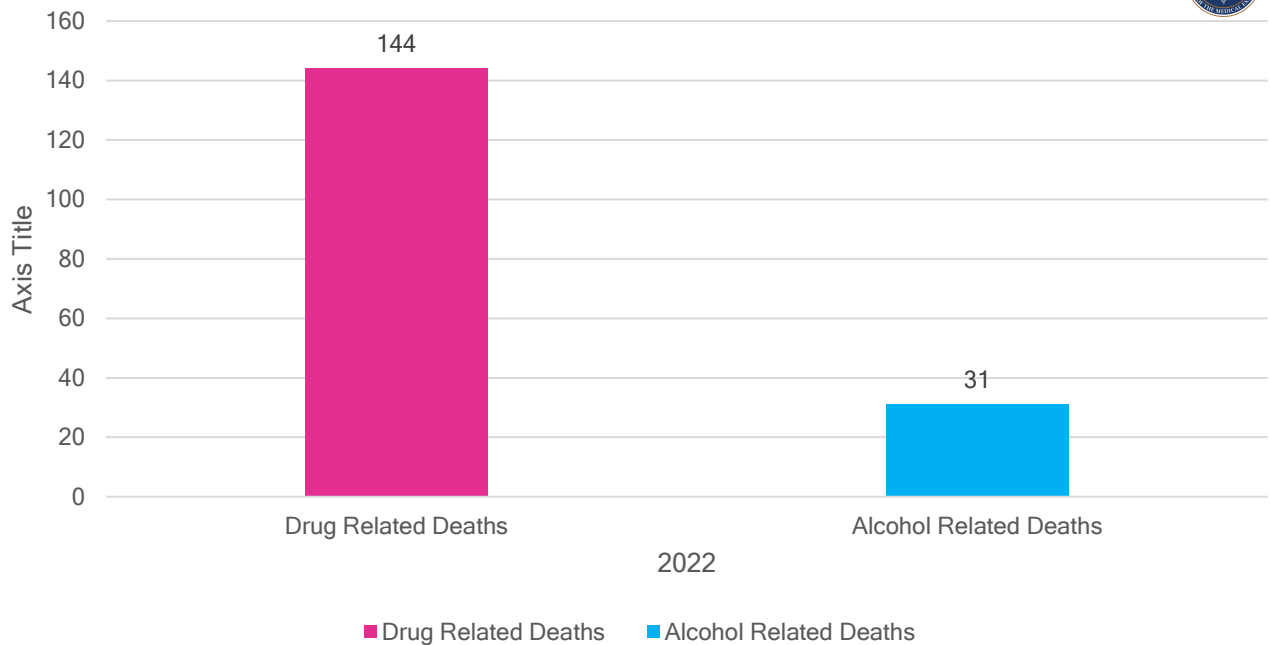
	Cremations Permits
■ 2022	3133
■ 2021	3351
■ 2020	3475

## Delaware County Fentanyl Related Deaths

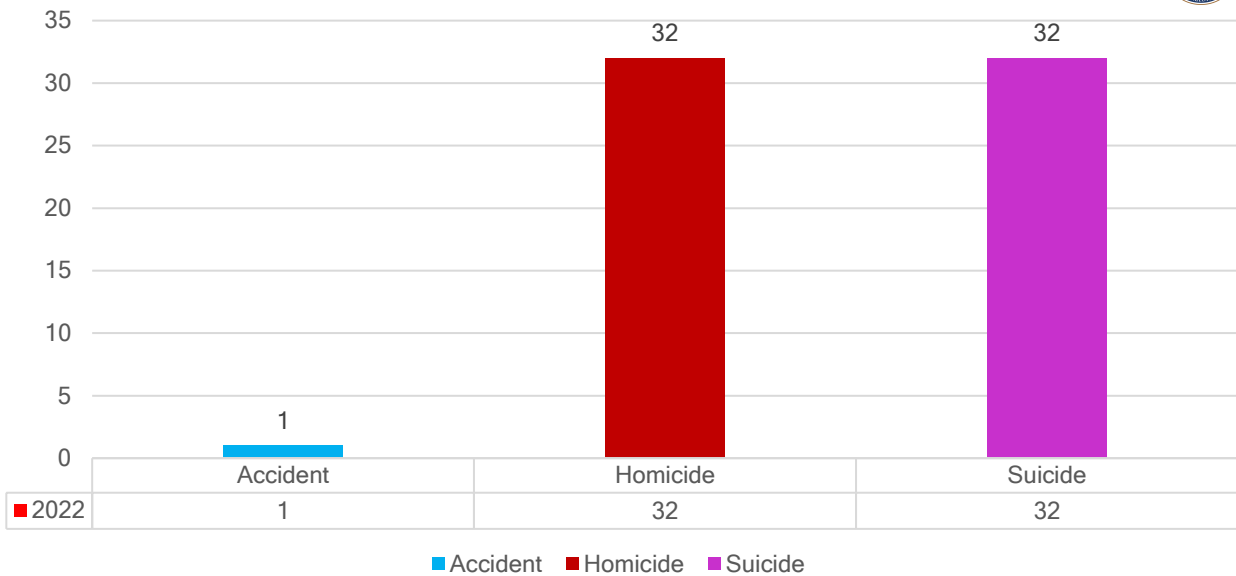


These facts are based on Toxicology Reports from an independent laboratory.

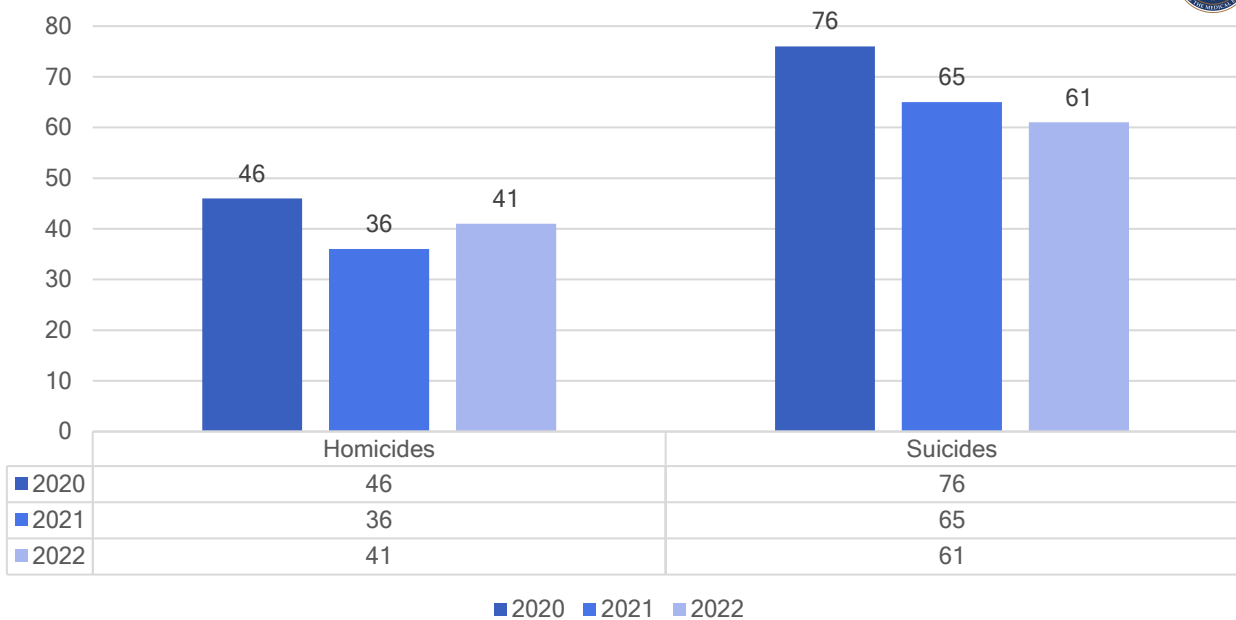
## Delaware County Substance Use Related Deaths



## Delaware County 2022 Gun Related Deaths

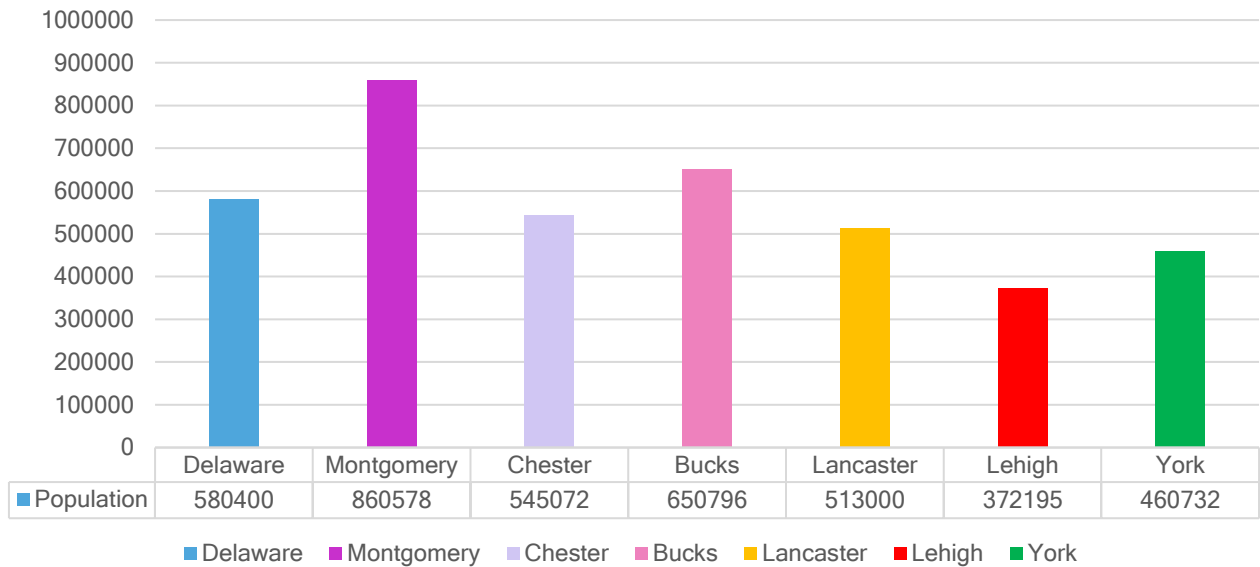


## Delaware County Homicides & Suicides

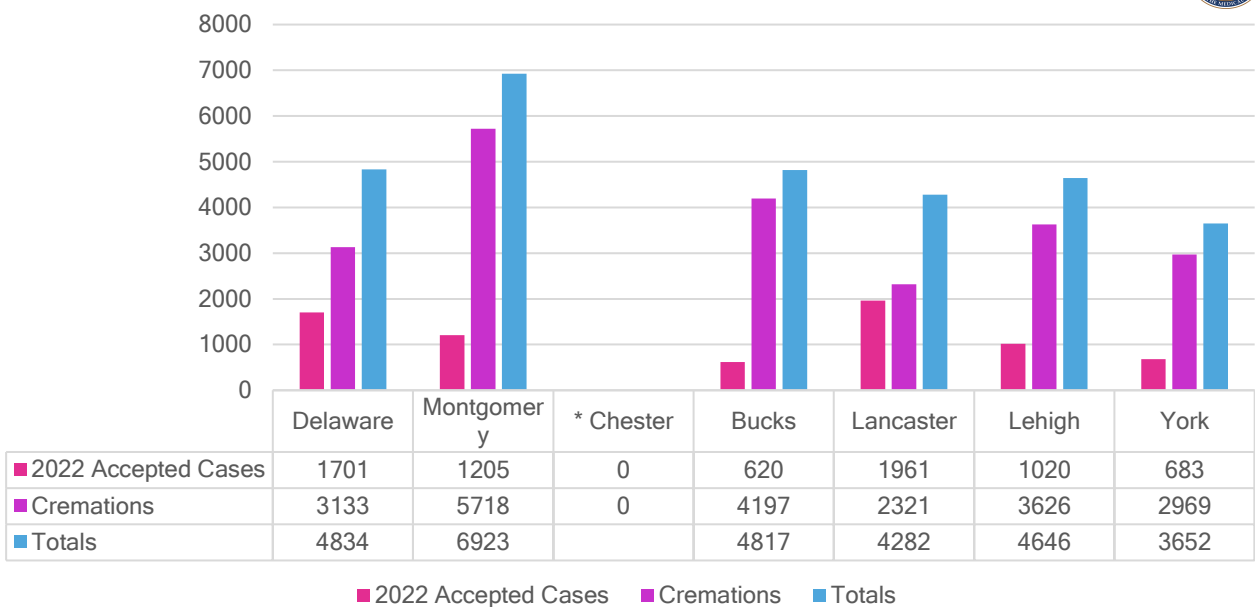


## 2022 Neighboring County Statistics

### Population by County

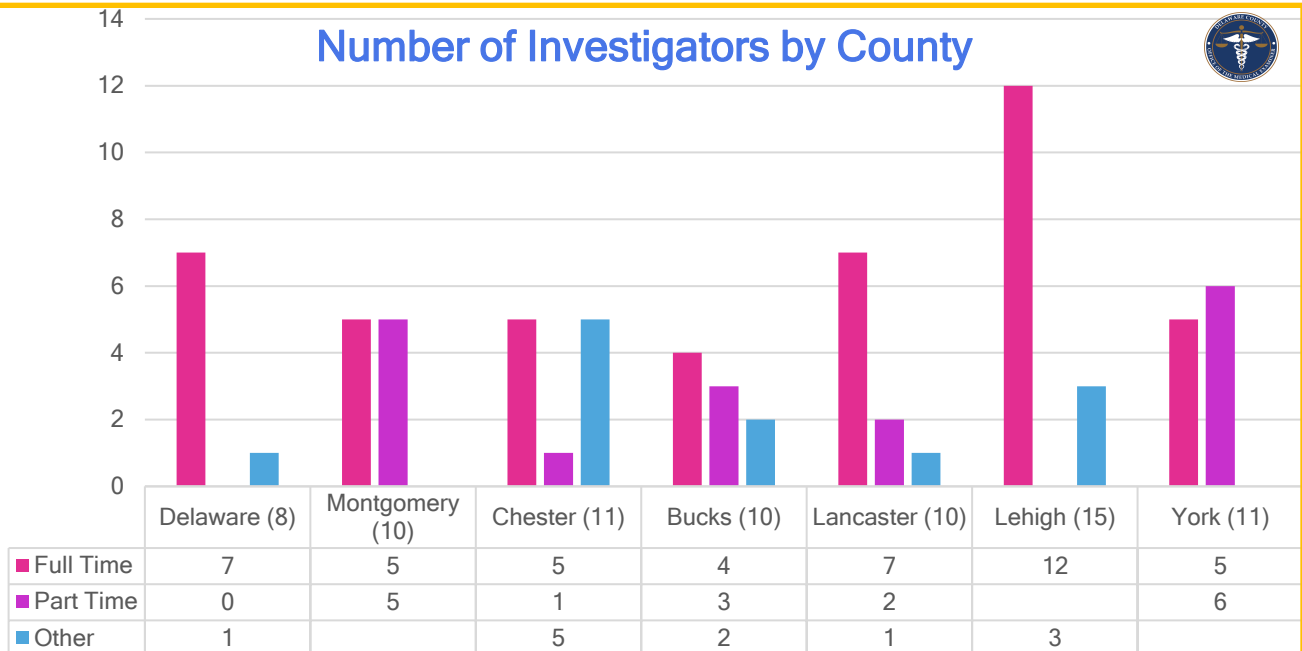


### Total Stats for 2022 by County



\* No stats available from Chester County at the time of this report. 2021 stats for Chester County were 1023 total accepted cases, 2841 Cremations, totaling 3864.

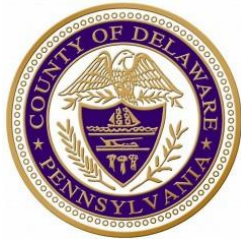
## Number of Investigators by County



## Homicides and Suicides by County



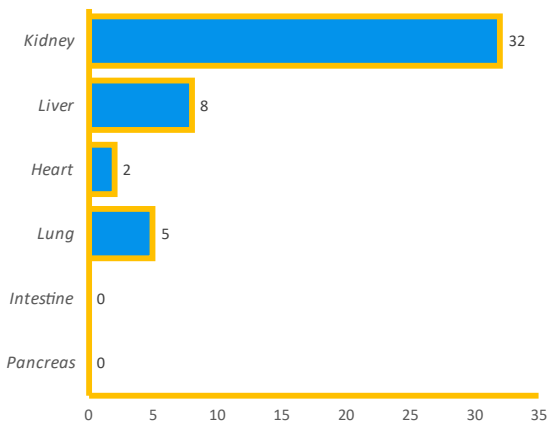
# 2022 Gift of Life Collaboration



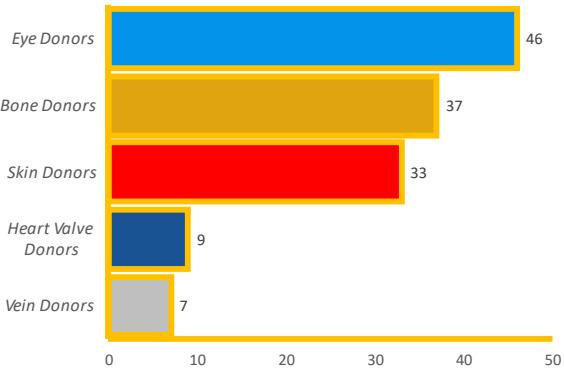
## Delaware County, PA Impact on Transplantation 2022



### 18 Organ Donors 47 Organs Transplanted



### 57 Tissue Donors



Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Jeffrey E. Lange".

**Jeffrey E. Lange**

**Administrator**

**Delaware County Office of the Medical Examiner**

