

Tennessee Code § 38-7-104. County medical examiner

(a) A county medical examiner shall be appointed by the county mayor, subject to confirmation by the county legislative body, based on a recommendation from a convention of physicians resident in the county. A county medical examiner shall be a physician who is either a graduate of an accredited medical school authorized to confer upon graduates the degree of doctor of medicine (M.D.) and who is duly licensed in Tennessee, or is a graduate of a recognized osteopathic college authorized to confer the degree of doctor of osteopathy (D.O.) and who is licensed to practice osteopathic medicine in Tennessee, and shall be elected from a list of a maximum of two (2) doctors of medicine or osteopathy nominated by convention of the physicians, medical or osteopathic, resident in the county, the convention to be called for this purpose by the county mayor.

(b) If it is not possible to obtain an acceptance as a county medical examiner from a physician in a county, authority is given for the election of a county medical examiner from an adjacent or another county. A county medical examiner, when temporarily unable to perform the duties of the office, shall have the authority to deputize any other physician in the area to act as county medical examiner during the absence. If the county legislative body fails to certify a county medical examiner for a county or if the county medical examiner resigns or is unable to fulfill the duties of the office during the interim between county legislative body sessions and a deputy has not been appointed by the county medical examiner, the chief medical examiner shall have the authority to appoint a county medical examiner to serve until the next session of the county legislative body.

(c) A county medical examiner shall serve a five-year term, and shall be eligible for reappointment by the county mayor with confirmation by the county legislative body.

(d) Whenever any county medical examiner shall be called as a witness in any proceedings before the grand jury or in any criminal case, the county medical examiner shall receive from the county as compensation for services as witness a fee as shall be determined by the court before which the proceedings are conducted, unless the fees are paid under provisions of § 38-7-111 [repealed].

(e) [Deleted by 2008 amendment.]

(f) The county medical examiner may be suspended by the county mayor for good cause, which shall include, but not be limited to, malfeasance in the performance of the duties of a county medical examiner, criminal conduct, or behavior that is unethical in nature or that is in violation of a relevant code of professional medical responsibility. The suspension shall be for a period of ninety (90) days. At the end of the ninety (90) day period, the suspension shall terminate, unless the county mayor has recommended to the county legislative body in writing that they remove the county medical examiner from office. If the county mayor recommends removal of the county medical examiner, then the county legislative body shall vote on whether to remove the county medical examiner from office within ninety (90) days of the date of the written recommendation. A majority vote shall be required in order to remove the county medical examiner from office. If a majority of the county legislative body does not vote for removal of the county medical examiner from office, then the suspension of the county medical examiner shall terminate immediately.

(g) (1) A medical investigator shall be a licensed emergency medical technician (EMT), paramedic, registered nurse, physician's assistant or a person registered by or a diplomate of the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators and approved by the county medical examiner as qualified to serve as medical investigator.

(2) If the county has an elected coroner, the coroner shall serve as the medical investigator for the county; provided, that such coroner meets the qualifications for a medical investigator set out in subdivision (g)(1). If the coroner is not qualified to serve as medical investigator, then the county legislative body shall, by resolution, either authorize the county medical examiner to appoint a medical investigator subject to confirmation by the county legislative body, or provide for this function through a contract for service approved by the county medical examiner and the county legislative body; provided, however, that, if the county has an elected coroner who has served in that capacity for ten (10) years or more, such coroner shall serve as the medical investigator for the county, regardless of whether the coroner meets the qualifications set out in subdivision (g)(1).

(3) The county medical investigator may conduct investigations when a death is reported, as provided in § 38-7-108, under the supervision of the county medical examiner. The county medical investigator may make pronouncements of death and may recommend to the county medical examiner that an autopsy be ordered. However, the county medical investigator shall not be empowered to sign a death certificate. The county medical examiner may delegate to the county medical investigator the authority to order an autopsy.

(h) County medical examiners and medical investigators shall be required to receive initial training and regular continuing education through the chief medical examiner and to operate according to the death investigation guidelines adopted by the department of health.

[Acts 1961, ch. 174, § 4; 1967, ch. 399, § 1; 1969, ch. 21, § 1; 1971, ch. 246, § 1; 1977, ch. 141, § 1; impl. am. Acts 1978, ch. 934, §§ 7, 36; T.C.A., § 38-704; Acts 1983, ch. 12, § 1; 1994, ch. 775, § 3; 2003, ch. 90, § 2; 2004, ch. 651, §§ 1, 2; 2005, ch. 472, § 1; 2008, ch. 969, §§ 5-10.]