



"Enriching Lives"

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

DEPARTMENT OF MEDICAL EXAMINER

1104 N. MISSION RD, LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90033



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County of Los Angeles Department of Medical Examiner Subpoena Process

Objective:

The purpose of this document is to offer updated guidance on the standardized processes utilized by the County of Los Angeles Department of Medical Examiner (LAC DME) regarding LAC DME cases, personnel and/or records.

Background:

- During the 2024 calendar year, 18,382 deaths were reported to the LAC DME, of which 11,452 deaths were investigated; 2,374 cases autopsied; and 4,615 external examinations conducted. Of these, 665 cases were homicides, and an additional 194 confirmed hit-and-run cases.
- This work is performed primarily by 11 Deputy Medical Examiners, 16 Criminalists, and 45 Investigators.
- The LAC DME has a centralized process for managing subpoenas through the Subpoena desk, that is managed by two clerks.

Subpoena Desk Process:

- A. Subpoena desk must be contacted a minimum of 24 hours in advance when requesting deputy medical examiners or criminalists for testimony or pre-scheduled appointments, and 72 hours if requesting investigators. Additional time allows for change in scheduling of case assignments and work hours.
- B. Preparation time of court materials, including report and photographs:
 - a. Photos, X-Rays CT-Scans: 48-72 hours
 - b. Discovery Packets and Slides: 2-4 weeks
 - c. Toxicology Discovery Packets: 4-6 weeks
- C. In the event the handling Deputy Medical Examiner who performed the autopsy is not available, another Deputy Medical Examiner will be assigned for testimony (see below for best practices).
- D. LAC DME personnel will not be able to testify on their regularly scheduled day off.
- E. Ensure Subpoenas Unit is aware of the testimony date to ensure LAC DME personnel is available for potential testimony.

Accreditations:

National Association of Medical Examiners (Provisional)
California Medical Association-Continuing Medical Education

Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education
Peace Officer Standards and Training Certified

- F. Attorneys must provide cell phone numbers to allow LAC DME personnel to reach out.
- G. Attorneys must inform the Subpoena Desk within 4 hours of changes including changes in courtrooms and appearance schedules
- H. Sudden and last-minute changes, as well as afterhours (4:30 PM to 7:30 AM) must be emailed to subpoenas@me.lacounty.gov. Email auto replies will direct inquiries to appropriate supervising members.

Best Practices:

- A. Limit callbacks. Callbacks incur significant operational impact delaying case turnaround of pending cases.
- B. Encourage remote confirmation and eliminate practice of requiring DME personnel to report to the courthouse to be placed on call. This practice incurs significant operational impact delaying case turnaround of pending cases.
- C. If the subpoenaed employee is not available (e.g., retirement, extended leave), an alternate personnel member will be assigned the case to represent for testimony on the morning of requested testimony and based on Deputy Medical Examiner availability.
- D. In addition, for Deputy Medical Examiners:
 - a. For preliminary hearings and when possible, consider using Proposition 115 hearsay testimony.
 - b. Schedule the Deputy Medical Examiner as the first witness in the afternoon session to minimize operational disruptions. Deputy Medical Examiners are dedicated to performing autopsies and external examinations each morning and are unavailable for court.
 - c. Straightforward cases:
 - i. Requested Deputy Medical Examiner arrives at the courthouse early to allow DDA to discuss any questions with DME (usually request appearance at 12-1pm versus 1:30 pm)
 - d. Complex cases (child abuse, undetermined manner of death):
 - i. Request a meeting to be scheduled at least 1 week prior to scheduled testimony
 - ii. Ensure Subpoenas Unit is aware of the testimony date to ensure Deputy Medical Examiner is available for call and potential testimony.
 - iii. Request DDAs also follow-up during the pre-meet to ensure Deputy Medical Examiner availability
- E. For case responses that require elevation, please follow the chain of command indicated in Outlook. The Department Head should not be the first attempt for elevation.