

**§3028. Investigation; autopsy**

**1. Authority to conduct investigation.** The medical examiner or medicolegal death investigator has authority to conduct an investigation and inquiry into the cause, manner and circumstances of death in a medical examiner case. The medical examiner or medicolegal death investigator shall, if it is determined necessary, immediately proceed to the scene and, subject to the authority of the Attorney General, assume custody of the body for the purposes of the investigation, and shall retain custody until the investigation has been completed or until the Chief Medical Examiner has assumed charge of the case.

[PL 2013, c. 113, §4 (AMD).]

**2. Investigation by law enforcement officer.** When death is not suspected to be the result of physical injury attributable to criminal conduct, the medical examiner may elect not to proceed to the scene, or the Chief Medical Examiner may elect not to dispatch a medical examiner or medicolegal death investigator to the scene. If the medical examiner elects not to proceed to the scene, or the Chief Medical Examiner elects not to dispatch a medical examiner or medicolegal death investigator to the scene, the law enforcement officer in charge of the scene shall:

A. Investigate, take photographs and take possession of useful objects as directed by the medical examiner, medicolegal death investigator or the Office of Chief Medical Examiner pursuant to subsection 4; [PL 2013, c. 113, §5 (AMD).]

B. [PL 2001, c. 291, §2 (RP).]

C. Remove the body in accordance with the instructions of the medical examiner, medicolegal death investigator or the Office of Chief Medical Examiner; and [PL 2013, c. 113, §5 (AMD).]

D. Make a report of the investigation available to the medical examiner, medicolegal death investigator or the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. [PL 2013, c. 113, §5 (AMD).]

[PL 2013, c. 113, §5 (AMD).]

**3. Assistance of law enforcement agency.** The medical examiner, the medicolegal death investigator or the pathologist as described in subsection 8 may request the assistance and use of the facilities of the law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the case for the purposes of photographing, fingerprinting or otherwise identifying the body. That agency shall provide the medical examiner, medicolegal death investigator or pathologist with a written report of the steps taken in providing the assistance.

[PL 2013, c. 113, §6 (AMD).]

**4. Possession of useful objects.** Except as otherwise directed by the Attorney General, the Attorney General's deputies or assistants, the medical examiner, the medicolegal death investigator or the Office of Chief Medical Examiner may direct that a law enforcement officer at the scene make measurements, take photographs and take possession of all objects that in the opinion of the medical examiner, medicolegal death investigator or the Office of Chief Medical Examiner may be useful in establishing the cause, manner and circumstances of death. For these same purposes, the medical examiner, medicolegal death investigator or the Office of Chief Medical Examiner may direct that a law enforcement officer take possession of any objects or specimens that have been removed from the victim at the scene or elsewhere while under medical care.

[PL 2013, c. 113, §7 (AMD).]

**5. Requests for objects.** Any person having possession of any object or objects, as described in subsection 4, shall at the request of the medical examiner or medicolegal death investigator give that object or objects to a law enforcement officer, to the medical examiner, to the medicolegal death investigator or to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. Medical personnel and institutions turning over any objects or specimens that have been removed from the victim while under medical care are immune from civil or criminal liability when complying with this subsection. Original written or

recorded material that might express suicidal intent must be sent to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. The Chief Medical Examiner may elect to accept copies in place of originals. [PL 2017, c. 475, Pt. A, §36 (AMD).]

**6. Examination of body.** In all cases, the medical examiner or medicolegal death investigator shall conduct a thorough examination of the body except in those cases when the body has already been disposed of and is not being exhumed or when the Chief Medical Examiner or Deputy Chief Medical Examiner determines, after review of available records and known circumstances, that the report of the death of the decedent may be certified and completed without examining the body. [PL 2013, c. 113, §9 (AMD).]

**7. Written report.** Upon completing an investigation, the medical examiner or medicolegal death investigator shall submit a written report of the investigator's findings to the Chief Medical Examiner on forms provided for that purpose. The investigator shall retain one copy of the report.

If an investigator reports suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation to the Chief Medical Examiner, the Chief Medical Examiner, by reporting that information to the department on behalf of the investigator, fulfills the medical examiner's mandatory reporting requirement under section 3477 or 4011-A. [PL 2013, c. 113, §10 (AMD).]

**8. Autopsy.** If, in any medical examiner case, in the opinion of the medical examiner, the Chief Medical Examiner, the district attorney for the district in which the death has occurred or the Attorney General, it is advisable and in the public interest that an autopsy be made, the autopsy must be conducted by the Chief Medical Examiner or by a physician that the medical examiner, with the approval of the Chief Medical Examiner, may designate. The medical examiner, with the approval of the Chief Medical Examiner, may elect to perform the autopsy. The person who performs the autopsy shall make a complete report of the findings of the autopsy and shall transmit the report to the medical examiner and the Office of Chief Medical Examiner, retaining one copy of the report. [PL 1991, c. 339, §4 (AMD).]

**9. Autopsy of child.** In the case of a child under the age of 3 years, when death occurs without medical attendance or, if attended, without a specific natural cause, the medical examiner shall order an autopsy. The autopsy may be waived by the Chief Medical Examiner, as long as the Chief Medical Examiner includes the reason for the waiver in the record. [PL 2001, c. 222, §9 (AMD).]

**10. Chief Medical Examiner; jurisdiction.** The Chief Medical Examiner may assume jurisdiction over a medical examiner case and may recertify the death when the Chief Medical Examiner finds that it is in the public interest to do so. The Chief Medical Examiner shall include the reasons for so doing in the record. [PL 2001, c. 222, §9 (AMD).]

**11. Final release of body.** In any medical examiner case the body shall not be finally released for embalming or burial except by order of the medical examiner in charge of the case, or by the Chief Medical Examiner. No medical examiner may release a body without first ensuring that the case has been reported to the Office of Chief Medical Examiner. [PL 1985, c. 611, §7 (AMD).]

**12. Report to domestic abuse panel.** If the Chief Medical Examiner determines that a death resulted from criminal conduct and that the victim was pregnant at the time of death, the Chief Medical Examiner shall send a copy of any report prepared under this section to the Domestic Abuse Homicide Review Panel created pursuant to Title 19-A, section 4115. [PL 2021, c. 647, Pt. B, §49 (AMD); PL 2021, c. 647, Pt. B, §65 (AFF).]

SECTION HISTORY

PL 1967, c. 534, §2 (NEW). PL 1973, c. 567, §20 (AMD). PL 1979, c. 538, §8 (RPR). PL 1985, c. 611, §7 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 97, §§1,2 (AMD). PL 1991, c. 339, §4 (AMD). PL 1995, c. 272, §§1-3 (AMD). PL 2001, c. 222, §9 (AMD). PL 2001, c. 291, §§1-7 (AMD). PL 2001, c. 345, §2 (AMD). PL 2003, c. 510, §B7 (AMD). PL 2005, c. 88, §A2 (AMD). PL 2011, c. 182, §1 (AMD). PL 2013, c. 113, §§4-10 (AMD). PL 2017, c. 475, Pt. A, §36 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 647, Pt. B, §49 (AMD). PL 2021, c. 647, Pt. B, §65 (AFF).

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