

INFORMATION HANDBOOK

Geauga County Coroner's Office

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Revised June 2025

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This “Information Handbook” has been assembled as a guide for individuals and agencies who interact with the Coroner’s Office to help explain how one should respond to a Coroner’s case. It is intended to help protect the public and the concerned, so that no one is unjustly accused of wrongdoing. Please consult the Coroner’s Office at 440-279-2165 regarding any death in which you have questions. The following selected sections of the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) are summarized in this handbook so that any reporting institution or individual may fully understand that providing information to the Office of the Coroner is merely in compliance with the law.

QUALIFICATIONS for COUNTY CORONER

Legal and Professional Requirements

- Must be a licensed physician in the State of Ohio for at least two years immediately preceding election or appointment as coroner.
- Must be in good standing in the medical profession at the time of election or appointment.

Continuing Education

- After election and before assuming office (or within 90 days of appointment), the coroner must complete 16 hours of continuing education sponsored by the Ohio State Coroners Association.
- During each four-year term, the coroner must complete 32 hours of continuing education, with 23 hours from statewide meetings and the remaining from regional meetings.

Term and Election

- **The county coroner is an elected official serving a four-year term.**

DUTIES of the CORONER

Overview

In Ohio, the county coroner is an elected official, required by law to be a licensed physician, who serves a four-year term. The coroner's primary responsibility is to determine the cause and manner of death in specific circumstances outline by state law.

Key Duties and Responsibilities

- **Death Investigation** – the coroner or their designee investigates deaths that occur under circumstances such as violence, accident, suicide, sudden or unexpected death, deaths in detention, or any suspicious or unusual manner. This includes children under two in apparent good health and developmentally disabled individuals.
- **Determining Cause and Manner of Death** – the coroner must establish both the medical cause (e.g., disease or injury) and the legal manner (e.g., accident, homicide, suicide, natural, undetermined) of death. Only the coroner can certify deaths that are not due to natural causes.

- Scene Control – the coroner or their designee has absolute authority over the scene of an unexplained death, including the body and any evidence nearby. No one may disturb the scene without the coroner or their designee’s express order.
- Autopsies and Examinations – when necessary, the coroner orders autopsies, toxicology tests, and other examinations to determine the cause and manner of death. These are typically performed by a pathologist or deputy coroner.
- Identification and Notification – the coroner is responsible for establishing the identity of the deceased, notifying next of kin in a timely and appropriate manner, and ensuring the proper release of personal effects.
- Record Keeping – the coroner’s office must maintain records of all death under their jurisdiction and certify the cause and manner of each death. Death certificates and coroner’s reports become public records upon case completion.
- Public Safety and Communication – the coroner’s office communicates findings to families, law enforcement, medical personnel, and the public, and helps identify new or ongoing public safety threats.
- Legal Authority – the coroner can issue subpoenas, administer oaths, and question witnesses during inquests. The office may also secure, catalog, and, with prosecutorial approval, destroy dangerous drugs found at death scenes if no longer needed for investigation.
- Collaboration – the coroner works with law enforcement, attorneys, insurance companies, and the public, and may provide expert testimony in criminal or civil trials.

The coroner’s role is both medical and legal, serving as an independent authority to ensure accurate, unbiased death investigation and reporting.

AUTHORITY

The primary authority of the coroner’s office is to determine the cause and manner of death in cases involving violence, accident, suicide, or any suspicious or unusual circumstances, as well as certain deaths of young children and developmentally disabled individuals.

The coroner's jurisdiction covers any death occurring in their county that falls under these categories, regardless of where the fatal injury occurred if the death itself happens in their county.

The coroner or their designee has the exclusive authority to investigate deaths as mandated by Ohio Revised Code 313 and rulings of the Ohio Attorney General's Office. The coroner's findings pertain strictly to the physiological cause and manner of death and do not determine criminal responsibility. The coroner's verdict, as recorded on the death certificate, is legally accepted unless changes by a direct order from a common pleas judge after a hearing. Coroners have no authority over deaths occurring on federal land within their county.

REPORTABLE DEATHS

Accidental – a death that occurs from unexpected, unintended, or unforeseen events

When a person dies under any of the following circumstances, the death must be reported to the Coroner's Office.

- a) Asphyxiation by gagging or foreign substance, such as food in the airway
- b) Asphyxiation by exclusion of oxygen, such as carbon monoxide
- c) Burns from chemicals, electricity, fire, liquid, or radiation
- d) Drowning
- e) Drug overdose, from medication, chemicals, or poisons. Including prescription medications, narcotics, and alcoholic beverages, whether sudden or if short- or long-term survival has occurred
- f) Explosion
- g) Falls
- h) Firearms
- i) Motor vehicle accidents, to including but not limited to aircraft, automobiles, bicycles, buses, buggies, motorcycles, snowmobiles, and watercraft, when death involves any occupant or related non-passenger (pedestrian) that was struck by debris
- j) Stillborn and newborn infant death, where there has been a recent or past traumatic incident involving the mother, such as a drug ingestion, homicide, motor vehicle accident, suicide, or any event that may have precipitated delivery or had detrimental effects on the fetus

- k) Weather related, including heat exhaustion, hypothermia, lightning, tornado, or any other environmental event

Homicide – an act in which one person causes the death of another person. This can be intentionally or unintentionally.

Hospice/Nursing Home/Assisted Living

When a person who is on hospice, receiving care in a nursing home or assisted living facility dies within one year of a significant fracture, has been involved in an accident that may have influenced death, death can be traced to an accident, suffers falls, fractures, or overdoses while receiving care, or death is otherwise suspicious.

Occupational (work related) deaths – a death that occurs while a person is at work or performing work-related tasks.

Occupational deaths are typically the result of workplace injuries, illnesses, or other incidents directly related to the work environment or activities. Occupational deaths can be sudden or delayed.

Suicide – the intentional act of causing one's own death by any means.

Therapeutic death - deaths that occur while under the influence of anesthesia, during anesthetic induction, or post anesthesia without the patient regaining consciousness.

Any death that is in doubt, questionable, or suspicious should be reported to the Coroner's Office. The coroner or their designee will determine jurisdiction after an initial investigation. Following this investigation, the Coroner's Office will either accept the case or refer it to the decedent's primary care provider.

REPORTING a DEATH

If a person’s death falls under any of the previously listed circumstances, is found outside, dies in a residence without hospice care, or there is any question regarding the circumstance of their death, the Coroner’s Office shall be contacted. Contact the Communications Division of the Geauga County Sheriff’s Office by calling 440-286-1234 and state that you would like to report a death. The communications officer will contact the coroner or their designee.

DISTURBING the DECEDENT

When a death appears to be of unnatural causes, or there is reason to believe the death was caused by unlawful, suspicious, or violent means the decedent(s) should not be disturbed until the coroner or their designee has completed their investigation. Clothing, jewelry, wallet, purse, and other personal items shall also remain undisturbed. Unlawfully disturbing the deceased is a violation of the Ohio Revised Code, Section 313.11.

PUBLIC RECORDS

Records of the Coroner’s Office are available to the public as defined in the Ohio Revised Code, Section 313.10. A form providing for request of such records, Coroner’s Release Form, is available on the Geauga County website.

SUPPORT GROUPS

- *Tracy Jordan, LOSS Team/Victim Advocate440-279-2062
- Catholic Charities.....440-285-3537
- Cope Line.....988
- *Cornerstone of Hope216-524-4673
- Family Pride in Northeast Ohio440-776-8075
- *Lake – Geauga (drug related deaths)440-255-0678
- Ravenwood Health.....440-285-3568
- Ubuntu Wellness440-214-9062

* - Grief support group and 1-on-1 counseling offered

OHIO REVISED CODE

Section 313.01 – Elected Term *(effective August 31, 2016)*

- (A) A coroner shall be elected quadrennially in each county, who shall hold office for a term of four years, beginning on the first Monday of January next year after election.
- (B) As used in the Revised Code, unless the context otherwise requires:
 - (1) “Coroner” means the coroner or medical examiner of the county in which death occurs or the dead human is found
 - (2) “Deputy coroner” means the deputy coroner or deputy medical examiner of the county in which death occurs of the dead human body is found.

Section 313.02 – Qualification for coroner – continuing education *(effective April 9, 2025)*

- (A)(1) Except as provided in division (A)(2) of this section, to be eligible to the office of coroner, a person shall be a physician who is licensed under Chapter 4731 of the Revised Code to practice medicine and surgery or osteopathic medicine and surgery, and who is in good standing in the person’s profession. For a county other than a charter county, the person also shall have been licensed under Chapter 4731 of the Revised Code to practice medicine and surgery or osteopathic medicine and surgery for a period of at least two years immediately preceding election or appointment as coroner.
- (2) Division (A)(1) of this section does not prohibit a person elected to the office of corner who holds that office on the effective date of this amendment, but who does not meet the eligibility conditions described in that division, from doing any of the following after that date:
 - (a) Continuing to hold the office of coroner of that county until the person’s term of office expires;
 - (b) Seeking reelection as coroner of that county for one or more subsequent terms of office and, if reelected, continuing to hold office for the duration of any subsequent term.
- (B)(1) Beginning in calendar year 2000 and in each fourth year thereafter, each newly elected coroner, after the general election but prior to commencing the term of office to which elected, shall attend and successfully complete sixteen hours of continuing education at programs sponsored by the Ohio State Coroners Association. Within ninety days after appointment to the office of coroner under section 305.02 of the Revised Code, the newly appointed coroner shall attend and successfully complete sixteen hours of continuing

education at programs sponsored by the association. Hours of continuing education completed under the requirement described in division (B)(1) of this section shall not be counted toward fulfilling the continuing education requirement described in (B)(2) of this section.

As used in division (B)(1) of this section, “newly elected coroner” means a person who did not hold the office of coroner on the date the person was elected coroner.

- (2) Except as otherwise provided in division (B)(2) of this section, beginning in the calendar year 2001, each coroner, during the coroner’s four-year term, shall attend and successfully complete thirty-two hours of continuing education at programs sponsored by the Ohio State Coroner’s Association. Except as otherwise provided in division (B)(2) of this section, each coroner shall attend and successfully complete twenty-four of these thirty-two hours at statewide meetings, and eight of these thirty-two hours at regional meetings, sponsored by the association. The association may approve attendance at continuing education programs it does not sponsor but, if attendance is approved, successful completion hours at these programs shall be counted toward fulfilling only the twenty-four hour requirement described in division (B)(2) of this section.
- (3) Upon successful completion of a continuing education program required by division (B)(1) or (2) of this section, the person who successfully completes the program shall receive from the association or the sponsoring organization a certificate indicating that the person successfully completed the program.

Section 313.05 – Appointment of deputy coroners and other personnel (*effective August 31, 2016*)

- (A)(1) The coroner may appoint, in writing, deputy coroners, who shall be licensed physicians of good standing in their profession, one of who may be designated as the chief deputy coroner. The coroner may also appoint pathologists as deputy coroners, who may perform autopsies, make pathological and chemical examinations, and perform other duties as directed by the coroner or recommended by the prosecuting attorney. The coroner may appoint any necessary technicians.

The coroner may contract for the services of deputy coroners to aid the coroner in the execution of the coroner’s powers and duties. Contracts for the services of deputy coroners are exempt from any competitive bidding requirements of the Revised Code.

- (2) The coroner may appoint, in writing, one or more secretaries and an official stenographer, who shall record the testimony of witnesses in attendance upon the coroner's inquest, preserve and file properly indexed records of all official reports, acts, and communications of the office, and perform other services as required by the coroner.
 - (3) The coroner may appoint clerks, stenographers, custodians, and investigators and shall define their duties.
 - (4) For the performance of their duties, deputy coroners, pathologists serving as deputy coroners, and technicians, stenographers, secretaries, clerks, custodians, and investigators shall receive salaries fixed by the coroner and payable from the county treasury upon the warrant of the county auditor. The compensation shall not exceed, in the aggregate, the amount fixed by the board of county commissioners for the coroner's office.
- (B)(1) A coroner may appoint, as a deputy coroner, as a pathologist serving as deputy coroner, or as a technician, stenographer, secretary, clerk, custodian, investigator, or other employee a person who is an associate of, or who is employed by, the coroner or a deputy coroner in the private practice of medicine in a partnership, professional association, or other medical business arrangement.
- (2) A coroner may appoint, as an investigator, a deputy sheriff within the county or a law enforcement officer of a political subdivision located within the county. The deputy sheriff or law enforcement officer appointed as an investigator may receive compensation for services performed as an investigator in addition to any other compensation allowed by law.

Section 313.08 – Coroner custodian of morgue – duties where decedent not identified

(effective August 17, 2006)

- (A) In counties in which a county morgue is maintained, the coroner shall be the official custodian of the morgue.

In all cases of the finding of the body or remains of a deceased person within a county in which a county morgue is maintained, when the identity of the deceased person is unknown, or the deceased person's relatives or other persons entitled to the custody of the body or remains of the deceased person are unknown or not present, the body or remains shall be removed to the county morgue, where it shall be held for identification and disposal.

- (B) The coroner shall make a reasonable attempt to promptly identify the body or remains of a deceased person. The coroner may use any means available in attempting to identify the body or remains.
- (C) If the coroner is unable to identify the body or remains of a deceased person within thirty days after the body or remains of the deceased person are delivered to the coroner, the coroner shall notify the bureau of criminal identification and investigation that the body or remains are located in the county morgue or are in the custody of the coroner and forward a DNA specimen from the body or remains of the deceased person to the bureau.
- (D) If a body or remains are discovered and delivered to the coroner and the coroner is unable to determine whether or not the body or remains that are discovered are the body or remains of a deceased person, the coroner shall notify the bureau of criminal identification and investigation of the existence of a possible body or remains of a deceased person and forward a DNA specimen from the body or remains to the bureau.
- (E) If the body or remains of a deceased person are not identified, in addition to providing the notice required under division © of this section, a coroner shall do all of the following prior to disposing of the body or remains:
- (1) Take the fingerprints of the body or remains of the deceased person, or cause the same to be taken, according to the fingerprint system of identification on the forms furnished by the superintendent of the bureau of criminal identification and investigation;
 - (2) Take or cause to be taken one or more photographs of the body or remains of the deceased person;
 - (3) Collect in a medically approved manner a DNA specimen from the body or remains of the deceased person;
 - (4) Promptly cause the fingerprints, the photographs, and the DNA specimen to be forwarded to the bureau of criminal identification and investigation for inclusion in the unidentified person database in accordance with procedures established by the superintendent of the bureau under division (H) of section 109.573 of the Revised Code.
- (F) The bureau of criminal identification and investigation shall cause the fingerprints, the photographs, and the DNA specimen forwarded by the coroner to the bureau pursuant to division (c)(4) of this section to be forwarded to the national crime information center

and the national DNA index system within ten days after the bureau completes the DNA analysis of the forwarded DNA specimen.

(G) The bureau shall provide the fingerprint forms, specimen vials, mailing tubes, labels, postage, and instruction needed for the collection and forwarding to the bureau pursuant to division (c)(4) of this section of the fingerprints and the DNA specimen and for the forwarding pursuant to division (c)(4) of this section to the bureau of the photographs.

(H) Upon the request of a coroner who has the duty to take, or cause the taking of, fingerprints and photographs under divisions (c)(1) and (2) of this section, the bureau of criminal identification and investigation shall take, or assist in the taking of, the required fingerprints and photographs.

(I) The coroner may submit any evidence gathered in the investigation of a death to the bureau of criminal identification and investigation for assistance in determining whether the death resulted from criminal activity. The bureau shall assist in the evaluation of evidence submitted under this division.

(J) As used in this section, “DNA analysis,” “DNA specimen,” and “unidentified person database” have the same meanings as in section 109.573 of the Revised Code.

Section 313.09 – Records (*effective August 26, 1975*)

The coroner shall keep a complete record of and shall fill in the cause of death on the death certificate, in all cases coming under his jurisdiction. All records shall be kept in the office of the coroner, but, if no such office is maintained, then such records shall be kept in the office of the clerk of the court of common pleas. Such records shall be properly indexed, and shall state the name, if known, of every deceased person as described in section 313.12 of the Revised Code, the place where the body was found, date of death, cause of death, and all other available information. The report of the coroner and the detailed findings of the autopsy shall be attached to the report of each case. The coroner shall promptly deliver, to the prosecuting attorney of the county in which such death occurred, copies of all necessary records relating to every death in which, in the judgment of the coroner or prosecuting attorney, further investigation is advisable. The sheriff of the county, the police of the city, the constable of the township, or marshal of the village in which the death occurred may be requested to furnish more information or make further investigation when requested by the coroner or his deputy. The prosecuting attorney may obtain copies of records and such other

information as is necessary from the office of the coroner. All records of the coroner are the property of the county.

Section 313.10 – Records to be public – certified copies as evidence *(effective April 9, 2025)*

- (A)(1) Except as otherwise provided in this section, the records of the coroner who has jurisdiction over the case, including, but not limited to, the detailed descriptions of the observations written during the progress of an autopsy and the conclusions drawn from those observations filed in the office of the coroner under division (A) of section 313.13 of the Revised Code, made personally by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision, are public records. Those records, or transcripts or photostatic copies of them, certified by the coroner shall be received as evidence in any criminal or civil action or proceeding in a court in this state, as to the facts contained in those records. The coroner of the county where the death was pronounced shall be responsible for the release of all public records relating to that death.
- (2) Except as otherwise provided in division (D) or (E) of this section, the following records in a coroner's office are not public records:
- (a) Preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;
 - (b) Photographs of a decedent made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;
 - (c) Suicide notes;
 - (d) Medical and psychiatric records provided to the coroner, a deputy coroner, or a representative of the coroner or a deputy coroner under section 313.091 of the Revised Code;
 - (e) Records of a deceased individual that are confidential law enforcement investigatory records as defined in section 149.43 of the Revised Code;
 - (f) Laboratory reports generated from the analysis of physical evidence by the coroner's laboratory that is discoverable under Criminal Rule 16.
- (3) In the coroner's discretion, photographs of a decedent may be used for medical, legal, or educational purposes.
- (B) All records in the coroner's office that are public records are open to inspection by the public, and any person may receive a copy of any such record or part of it upon demand

in writing, accompanied by payment of a record retrieval and copying fee, at the rate of twenty-five cents per page or a minimum fee of one dollar.

- (C)(1) The coroner shall provide a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner with respect to a decedent to a person who makes a written request as the next of kin of the decedent. The following persons may make a request pursuant to this division as the next of kin of a decedent:
- (a) The surviving spouse of the decedent;
 - (b) If there is no surviving spouse, or if the surviving spouse has died without having made a request pursuant to this division, any child of the decedent over eighteen years of age, with each child over eighteen years of age having an independent right to make a request pursuant to this division;
 - (c) If there is no surviving spouse or child over eighteen years of age, or if the surviving spouse and all children over eighteen years of age have died without having made a request pursuant to this division, the parents of the decedent, with each parent having an independent right to make a request pursuant to this division;
 - (d) If there is no surviving spouse, child over eighteen years of age, or parents of the decedent, or if all have died without having made a request pursuant to this division, the brothers and sisters of the decedent, whether of the whole or the half blood, with each having an independent right to make a request pursuant to this division.
- (2) If there is no surviving person who may make a written request as next of kin for a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner pursuant to division (C)(1) of this section, or if all next of kin of the decedent have died without having made a request pursuant to that division, the coroner shall provide a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner with respect to a decedent to the representative of the estate of the decedent who is the subject of the records upon written request made by the representative.
- (D) A journalist may submit to the coroner a written request to view suicide notes, photographs of the decedent made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's discretion or supervision, or preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings but not records of a deceased individual that are confidential law enforcement investigatory records as defined in section 149.43 of the Revised Code. The request shall include the journalist's name and title and the name and address of the journalist's employer and state

that the granting of the request would be in the best interest of the public. If a journalist submits a written request to the coroner to view the records described in this division and the final autopsy is not yet completed, the coroner may grant the journalist's request.

After the final autopsy report and final death certification are complete, if a journalist submits a written request to the coroner to view the records described in this division, the coroner shall grant the journalist's request.

A journalist shall not copy the preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings, suicide notes or photographs of the decedent.

(E)(1) An insurer may submit to the coroner a written request to obtain a copy of the full and complete records of the coroner with respect to a deceased person. The request shall include the name of the deceased person, the type of policy to which the written request relates, and the name and address of the insurer.

(2) If an insurer submits a written request to the coroner to obtain a copy of records pursuant to division (E)(1) of this section, the coroner shall grant that request.

(3) Upon the granting of a written request to obtain a copy of records by the coroner, the insurer may utilize the records for the following purposes:

(a) To investigate any first party claim or third party claim asserted under a policy of insurance issued by the insurer that arises from the death of the deceased person;

(b) To determine coverage for any first party claim or third party claim asserted under a policy of insurance issued by the insurer that arises from the death of the deceased person;

(c) To determine the insurer's liability for any first party claim or third party claim asserted under a policy of insurance issued by the insurer that arises from the death of the deceased person.

(4) Prior to the delivery of records that are the subject of a request made pursuant to division (E)(1) of this section, the coroner may require the insurer who submitted the written request for the records to provide a payment to the coroner of a record retrieval and copying fee at the rate of twenty-five cents per page or a minimum fee of one dollar.

(5) Any records produced by the coroner in response to a written request under division (E)(1) of this section shall remain in the care, custody, and control of the insurer and its

employees or representatives at all times. The insurer may not release or disclose the records to any other person unless any of the following apply:

- (a) The release of the records is reasonably necessary to further a purpose described in division (E)(3) of this section.
- (b) A court of competent jurisdiction orders the insurer to produce the records.
- (c) The insurer is required to produce the records in response to a civil or criminal subpoena.
- (d) The insurer is responding to a request for the records from a law enforcement agency, the department of insurance or a department of insurance from another state, or another governmental authority.
- (F) The coroner may contact the decedent's next of kin to inform the next of kin that a journalist or an insurer has submitted a written request pursuant to division (D) or (E) of this section and whether the coroner has granted the journalist's or the insurer's request.
- (G) As used in this section:
 - (1) "Full and complete records of the coroner" includes, but is not limited to, the following:
 - (a) The detailed descriptions of the observations written by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision during the progress of an autopsy and the conclusions drawn from those observations that are filed in the office of the coroner under division (A) of section 313.13 of the Revised Code;
 - (b) Preliminary autopsy and investigative notes and findings made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;
 - (c) Photographs of a decedent made by the coroner or by anyone acting under the coroner's direction or supervision;
 - (d) Suicide notes;
 - (e) Medical and psychiatric records provided to the coroner, a deputy coroner, or a representative of the coroner or a deputy coroner under section 313.091 of the Revised Code;
 - (f) Records of a deceased individual that are confidential law enforcement investigatory records as defined in section 149.43 of the Revised Code;
 - (g) Laboratory reports generated from the analysis of physical evidence by the coroner's laboratory that is discoverable under Criminal Rule 16.
 - (2) "Insurer" has the same meaning as in section 3901.07 of the Revised Code.

(3) “Journalist” has the same meaning as in section 149.43 of the Revised Code.

Section 313.11 – Unlawfully disturbing a body *(effective September 26, 1990)*

- (A) No person, without an order from the coroner, any deputy coroner, or an investigator or other person designated by the coroner as having authority to issue an order under this section, shall purposely remove or disturb the body of any person who has died in the manner described in section 313.12 of the Revised Code, or purposely and without such an order disturb the clothing or any article upon or near such a body or any of the possessions that the coroner has a duty to store under section 313.14 of the Revised Code.
- (B) It is an affirmative defense to a charge under this section that the offender attempted in good faith to rescue or administer life-preserving assistance to the deceased person, even though it is established he was dead at the time of the attempted rescue or assistance.
- (C) Whoever violates this section is guilty of unlawfully disturbing a body, a misdemeanor of the fourth degree.

Section 313.12 – Notice to coroner of violent, suspicious, unusual or sudden death *(effective April 9, 2025)*

- (A)(1) When any person dies in circumstances as described in division (A)(2) of this section, the physician, certified nurse-midwife, clinical nurse specialist, or certified nurse practitioner called in attendance and any of the following who obtains knowledge thereof arising from the person’s duties, shall immediately notify the office of the coroner of the known facts concerning the time, place, manner, and circumstances of the death, and any other information that is required pursuant to sections 313.01 to 313.22 of the Revised Code:
 - (a) A health care worker caring for the person;
 - (b) Any member of an ambulance service or emergency squad;
 - (c) A law enforcement agency.
- (2) The notification required by division (A)(1) of this section applies in all of the following circumstances:
 - (a) When any person dies as a result of criminal or other violent means, by casualty, by suicide, or in any suspicious or unusual manner;
 - (b) When any person, including a child under two years of age, dies suddenly when in apparent good health;

- (c) When any person with a developmental disability dies regardless of the circumstances.
- (3) In the case of a death in circumstances as described in division (A)(2) of this section, if a request is made for cremation, the funeral director called in attendance shall immediately notify the coroner.
- (B) As used in this section:
 - (1) “Developmental disability” has the same meaning as in section 5123.01 of the Revised Code.
 - (2) “Health care worker” means any individual licensed or otherwise authorized by the state to practice a health care profession and any other individual who provides health-related services in any setting as part of the individual’s employment or otherwise for remuneration.

Section 313.13 – Autopsy contrary to deceased person’s religious beliefs

- (A) As used in this section:
 - (1) “Friend” means any person who maintained regular contact with the deceased person, and who was familiar with the deceased person's activities, health, and religious beliefs at the time of the deceased person's death, any person who assumes custody of the body for burial, and any person authorized by written instrument, executed by the deceased person to make burial arrangements.
 - (2) “Relative” means any of the following persons: the deceased person’s surviving spouse, children, partners, or siblings.
- (B) The coroner, deputy coroner, or pathologist shall perform an autopsy if, in the opinion of the coroner, or, in his absence, in the opinion of the deputy coroner, an autopsy is necessary, except for certain circumstances provided for in this section where a relative or friend of the deceased person informs the coroner that an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, or the coroner otherwise has reason to believe that an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs. The coroner has such reason to believe an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs if a document signed by the deceased and stating an objection to an autopsy is found on the deceased's person or in his effects. For the purposes of this division, a person is a relative or friend of the deceased person if the person presents an affidavit stating that he is a relative or friend as defined in division (A) of this section.

(C)(1) Except as provided in division (F) of this section, if a relative or friend of the deceased person informs the coroner that an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, or the coroner otherwise has reason to believe that an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, and the coroner concludes the autopsy is a compelling public necessity, no autopsy shall be performed for forty-eight hours after the coroner takes charge of the deceased person. An autopsy is a compelling public necessity if it is necessary to the conduct of an investigation by law enforcement officials of a homicide or suspected homicide, or any other criminal investigation, or is necessary to establish the cause of the deceased person's death for the purpose of protecting against an immediate and substantial threat to the public health. During the forty-eight hour period, the objecting relative or friend may file suit to enjoin the autopsy, and shall give notice of any such filing to the coroner. The coroner may seek an order waiving the forty-eight hour waiting period. If the coroner seeks such an order, the court shall give notice of the coroner's motion, by telephone if necessary, to the objecting relative or friend, or, if none objected, to all of the deceased person's relatives whose addresses or telephone numbers can be obtained through the exercise of reasonable diligence. The court may grant the coroner's motion if the court determines that no friend or relative of the deceased person objects to the autopsy or if the court is satisfied that any objections of a friend or relative have been heard, and if it also determines that the delay may prejudice the accuracy of the autopsy, or if law enforcement officials are investigating the deceased person's death as a homicide and suspect the objecting party committed the homicide or aided or abetted in the homicide. If no friend or relative files suit within the forty-eight hour period, the coroner may proceed with the autopsy.

(2) The court shall hear a petition to enjoin an autopsy within forty-eight hours after the filing of the petition. The Rules of Civil Procedure shall govern all aspects of the proceedings, except as otherwise provided in division (C)(2) of this section. The court is not bound by the rules of evidence in the conduct of the hearing. The court shall order the autopsy if the court finds that under the circumstances the coroner has demonstrated a need for the autopsy. If the court enjoins the autopsy, the coroner shall immediately proceed under section 313.14 of the Revised Code.

(D)(1) If a relative or friend of the decedent informs the coroner that an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, or the coroner otherwise has reason to believe that an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, and the coroner concludes the autopsy is necessary, but not a compelling public necessity, the coroner may file a petition in a court of common pleas seeking a declaratory judgment authorizing the autopsy. Upon the filing of the petition, the court shall schedule a hearing on the petition, and shall issue a summons to the objecting relative or friend, or, if none objected, to all of the deceased person's relatives whose addresses can be obtained through the exercise of reasonable diligence. The court shall hold the hearing no later than forty-eight hours after the filing of the petition. The court shall conduct the hearing in the manner provided in division (C)(2) of this section.

(2) Each person claiming to be a relative or friend of the deceased person shall immediately upon receipt of the summons file an affidavit with the court stating the facts upon which the claim is based. If the court finds that any person is falsely representing himself as a relative or friend of the deceased person, the court shall dismiss the person from the action. If after dismissal no objecting party remains, and the coroner does not have reason to believe that an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, the court shall dismiss the action and the coroner may proceed with the autopsy. The court shall order the autopsy after hearing the petition if the court finds that under the circumstances the coroner has demonstrated a need for the autopsy. The court shall waive the payment of all court costs in the action. If the petition is denied, the coroner shall immediately proceed under section 313.14 of the Revised Code.

Any autopsy performed pursuant to a court order granting an autopsy shall be performed using the least intrusive procedure.

(E) For purposes of divisions (B), (C)(1), and (D)(1) of this section, any time the friends or relatives of a deceased person disagree about whether an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, the coroner shall consider only the information provided to him by the person of highest priority, as determined by which is listed first among the following:

- (1) The deceased person's surviving spouse;
- (2) An adult son or daughter of the deceased person;

- (3) Either parent of the deceased person;
- (4) An adult brother or sister of the deceased person;
- (5) The guardian of the person of the deceased person at the time of death;
- (6) A person other than those listed in divisions (E)(1) to (5) of this section who is a friend as defined in division (A) of this section.

If two or more persons of equal priority disagree about whether an autopsy is contrary to the deceased person's religious beliefs, and those persons are also of the highest priority among those who provide the coroner with information the coroner has reason to believe that an autopsy is contrary to the person's religious beliefs.

(F)(1) Divisions (C)(1) and (2) of this section do not apply in any case involving aggravated murder, suspected aggravated murder, murder, suspected murder, manslaughter, or suspected manslaughter.

(2) this section does not prohibit the coroner, deputy coroner, or pathologist from administering a chemical test to the blood of the deceased person to determine the alcohol, drug, or alcohol and drug content of the blood, when required by division (B) of section 313.13 of the Revised Code, and does not limit the coroner, deputy coroner, or pathologist in the performance of his duties in administering a chemical test under that division.

Section 313.14 – Notice to relatives – disposition of property *(effective April 9, 2025)*

(A)(1) The coroner shall make a reasonable effort to notify any known relatives of a deceased person who meets death in the manner described by section 313.12 of the Revised Code by letter or otherwise. The coroner shall also make a reasonable effort to determine the identity of the person who has been assigned the rights of disposition for the deceased person under sections 2108.70 to 2108.90 of the Revised Code and shall notify that person. After the coroner has completed the performance of the coroner's legal duties with respect to the body of the deceased person, the coroner shall return the body to that person.

(2) The coroner shall take charge and possession of all moneys, clothing, and other valuable personal effects of the deceased person, found in connection with or pertaining to the body, and shall store the possessions in the county coroner's office or such other suitable place as is provided for that storage by the board of county commissioners. If the coroner

considers it advisable, the coroner may, after taking adequate precautions for the security of those possessions, store the possessions where the coroner finds them until other storage space becomes available. The person who has been assigned the rights of disposition for the deceased person under sections 2108.70 to 2108.90 of the Revised Code may request the coroner to give those possessions to that person. After the person who has been assigned the rights of disposition for the deceased person under sections 2108.70 to 2108.90 of the Revised Code, upon the person's request under this division, receives the possessions of the deceased person from the coroner, that person shall deliver the possessions to the executor or administrator of the estate of the deceased person or to any other person who is legally entitled to any of those possessions.

(B) In cases in which the cost of the burial is paid by the county, after using such of the clothing as is necessary in the burial of the body, the coroner shall sell at public auction the valuable personal effects of the deceased persons, found in connection with or pertaining to the unclaimed dead body, except firearms, which shall be disposed of as provided in division (C) of this section. The coroner shall make a verified inventory of the effects and they shall be sold within eighteen months after burial, or after delivery of the body in accordance with section 1713.34 of the Revised Code. All moneys derived from the sale shall be deposited in the county treasury. A notice of the sale shall be given for five days in succession, and the sale shall be held immediately thereafter.

The notice shall be made using at least one of the following methods:

- (1) In the print or digital edition of a newspaper of general circulation within the county;
- (2) On the official public notice web site established under section 125.182 of the Revised Code;
- (3) On the web site and social media account of the county.

The cost of such advertisement and notices shall be paid by the board upon the submission of a verified statement for that cost, certified to the coroner.

(C) If a firearm is included in the personal effects of a deceased person who meets death in the manner described by section 313.12 of the Revised Code, the coroner shall deliver the firearm to the chief of police of the municipal corporation within which the body is found, or to the sheriff of the county if the body is not found within a municipal corporation. Upon delivery of the firearm to the chief of police or the sheriff, the chief of police or sheriff shall

give the coroner a receipt for the firearm that states the date of delivery and an accurate description of the firearm. The firearm shall be used for evidentiary purposes only.

The person who has been assigned the rights of disposition for the deceased person under sections 2108.70 to 2108.90 of the Revised Code may request that the firearm be given to that person once the firearm is no longer needed for evidentiary purposes. The chief of police or the sheriff shall give the firearm to that person who requested the firearm only if the person may lawfully possess the firearm under applicable law of this state or the United States. The chief of police or the sheriff shall keep a record identifying the person to whom the firearm is given, the date the firearm was given to that person, and an accurate description of the firearm. The person to whom the firearm is given upon the person's request under this division shall deliver the firearm to the executor or administrator of the estate of the deceased person or to any other person who is legally entitled to the firearm.

If the person who has been assigned the rights of disposition for the deceased person under sections 2108.70 to 2108.90 of the Revised Code does not request the firearm or is not entitled to possess the firearm, the firearm shall be used at the discretion of the chief of police or the sheriff.

(D) This section does not invalidate section 1713.34 of the Revised Code.

Section 313.15 – Determination of responsibility for death *(effective October 1, 1953)*

All dead bodies in the custody of the coroner shall be held until such time as the coroner, after consultation with the prosecuting attorney, or with the police department of a municipal corporation, if the death occurred in a municipal corporation, or with the sheriff, has decided that it is no longer necessary to hold such body to enable him to decide on a diagnosis giving a reasonable and true cause of death, or to decide that such body is no longer necessary to assist any of such officials in his duties.

Section 313.19 – Coroner's verdict the legally accepted cause of death *(effective October 1, 1953)*

The cause of death and the manner and mode in which the death occurred, as delivered by the coroner and incorporated in the coroner's verdict and in the death certificate filed with the division of vital statistics, shall be the legally accepted manner and mode in which such death occurred, and the legally accepted cause of death, unless the court of common pleas of the

county in which the death occurred, after a hearing, directs the coroner to change his decision as to such cause and manner and mode of death.

Section 313.22 – Rights of administrator or executor *(effective October 1, 1953)*

Sections 311.01 to 311.21, inclusive, of the Revised Code do not interfere with the rights of any appointed and qualified administrator or executor, but moneys and effects taken by the coroner shall be delivered to such administrator or executor, whether before or after return thereof to the probate court.