

# **Baldwin County Coroner's Office**

## **Annual Report FY 2017**

The Baldwin County Coroner's office consist of the following employees:

**Stan Vinson - Coroner**

**Dr. Brian Pierce – Chief Deputy Coroner**

**Troy Dyess – Deputy Coroner**

**Daren Montgomery – Deputy Coroner**

**Brandy Byrd: Administrative Support Specialist III      Full-Time 40 hours/week**

**Victoria Key: Administrative Support Specialist I    Part-Time 24 hours/week**

The Baldwin County Coroner's Office (BCCO) covers over 2000 square miles of Baldwin County and serves some 212,000 residents as well as its visitors. Coroner Stan Vinson has appointed 3 Deputy Coroners to assist him with his duties. Still with only 4 investigators serving the Coroner's Office, each essentially covers 42 hours of call time per week. Administratively the County provides 1 full time office administrator and one part-time assistant resulting in approximately 64 hours of work per week. Phones are answered 24 hours/day, 365 days a year. We are the only County office, other than the Sheriff's office, that never closes for weekends or holidays. The Coroner's office handled 468 Cases in the FY 2017, which equated to 1.3 deaths per day, and with continued growth, this number too will increase.

The primary purpose of the Coroner's Office is to investigate unattended, unexplained, violent and accidental deaths as set forth in the Constitution of Alabama Title 11, Chapter 5. Our Mission Statement is as follows:

### **Mission Statement**

*To accurately determine the cause and manner of death, of individuals that die within Baldwin County; through a fair, ethical, and competent investigation of death; performed by qualified and trained individuals, in accordance with the accepted medicolegal death investigation professional standards; ensuring the integrity of the investigation.*

To establish and maintain cooperative, professional relationships with law enforcement, funeral homes, and other community members.

To assist the bereaved in the loss of a loved one.

To earn and hold the trust and respect of the citizens that we are privileged and honored to serve.

Our goal of 1-hour response time and timely progression of Death Investigation has been upheld in the past year. Additionally, the goals set forth in 2013 included development of a plan and partnerships to move Baldwin County toward a Medical Examiner Program. Future planning should include the following goals and objectives, individual certification of all Deputy Coroners by ABMDI and Office Accreditation through IACME, and establishment of SOP's specific to the BCCO. Continuing to strive to improve the office of Coroner.

The 2017 Fiscal Year (FY) saw 468 cases as accepted through the Coroner's Office. We need to note that not all cases reported to us are accepted as Coroner Cases. Many times, we will be notified of Hospice Cases or Hospital Cases that do not meet the criteria for investigation by the Coroner's Office.

Of the 468 cases, 182 were sent for autopsy (38%) and 349 were ruled as natural deaths (74.5 %).

The remaining 119 cases have the following breakdown:

47 Violent Deaths MVA, Drownings,

31 Suicides

21 Drug Related Deaths

9 Homicides

11 Undermined

\*see appendix A for Excel spreadsheet breakdown of all cases.

Continued assistance with Law Enforcement, the District Attorney and the Alabama Department of Forensic Science (ADFS) office is essential for these cases to be adjudicated accurately and without bias.

The BCCO was responsible for taking custody of 279 bodies, of which 182 were sent to ADFS, in Mobile, AL, for autopsy then released/returned to a funeral home of the family's choice.

The BCCO transported and housed 106 bodies for families from out of state or for cases needing a medical record review.

Transportation costs for the 2017 FY was approximately \$50,000.00. This may be an area where cost savings could be made. Recent developments with the state lab in Mobile and adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> transport per case will no doubt be reflected in our cost this upcoming year.

Coroner's responded to 160 death scenes for investigative purposes. Typically, when Coroners respond to a scene, an autopsy is warranted. Each case is different but often scene investigation will result in at least an external exam and toxicology.

This past year the Coroner's Office could identify 100 % of the cases, leaving us no case with an unidentified body. I think it important to point out, BCCO does retain all cremains from county cremations. This is a cooperative effort with the Council on Aging and the Coroner's office. So why we had no unidentified bodies in FY 2017, we did have 9 unclaimed bodies. Resulting in 9 county Cremations. This practice of cremating unclaimed bodies was undertaken in 2014, as the county has no more gravesites.

The BCCO works with the AOC and the Eye Bank to assist with organ donation. The BCCO assisted with 5 Tissue harvests in 2017. We assist the organ recovery teams whenever it is feasible to honor the subject's or family wishes. We do however guard the public trust and should further investigation be warranted for pending charges the request to harvest may be denied by the Coroner's Office.

I would respectfully submit this FY 2017 report to the Commission, along with the attached spreadsheet. Additionally, we have included in our SOP's that this report will be submitted annually. This should assist the Commission, Law Enforcement, and the Coroner's Office in staying prepared and being fluid in its response to changing patterns and concerns.

I would request that this report be placed on the Baldwin County Website for the public to view and understand the Scope and Practice of the Coroner's Office to Baldwin County and its Citizens.