

# **Baldwin County Coroner's Office**

## **Annual Report FY 2019**

In 2019 the Baldwin County Coroner's office consisted of the following employees:

**Dr. Brian Pierce DC, D-ABMDI: Coroner**

**Troy Dyess: Chief Deputy Coroner**

**Daren Montgomery: Deputy Coroner**

**Stephen Street: Deputy Coroner**

**Stan Vinson: Accreditation Consultant**

**Brandy Byrd: Administrative Support Specialist III**

**Shanna Bonner: Administrative Support Specialist I**

The Baldwin County Coroner's Office (BCCO) covers over 2000 square miles of Baldwin County and serves some 212,000 residents as well as 6.5 Million tourists annually. Coroner Dr. Brian Pierce appointed 3 Deputy Coroners to assist him with his duties. Phones are answered 24 hours/day, 365 days a year. The Coroner's Office handled 479 Cases in the FY 2019, which equated to 1.32 deaths per day.

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.

The office continued to maintain a 1-hour response time as well as a timely progression of Death Investigation, resolving most cases in less than 90 days. Additionally, the following goals were achieved:

1. The Coroner is certified by ABMDI with 2 other deputies enrolled in the program.
2. Standard Operating Procedures were established and communicated with our Community Partners.
3. The office entered an Accreditation Process with the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IAC&ME). This will be a crucial step in the overall planning of establishing a Medical Examiner for Baldwin County. Deadline for this Accreditation is July 2020.
4. Intern Program was initiated with two participants.
5. Began scheduling a Supervisor and an On-Call Deputy each day. This allowed the office to have 2 Coroners on call each day.
6. Gained access to LETS for identifying individuals and Active 911 for improving response times.

The 2019 Fiscal Year (FY) saw 479 cases as accepted through the Coroner's Office.

Of the 479 cases, 186 were sent for autopsy (39%) and 350 were ruled as natural deaths (73%).

The remaining 129 cases have the following breakdown:

60 Violent Deaths: MVA, Drownings, Fire Related

41 Suicides

21 Drug Related Deaths

6 Homicides

1 Undetermined

0 Infectious Death

0 Pending

\*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 331 bodies, of which 186 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 145 bodies for families from out of state or for cases needing a medical record review.

Transportation costs for the 2019 FY was \$90,400.00, up from \$82,000.00 in 2018. The changes in policy at the State Lab in Mobile, reflected an \$8,400.00 dollar increase to transportation cost in 2019. Although the County should have re-cooped 68% or \$61,100.00, from cities and towns that had deaths requiring transportation to ADFS.

The Coroner's Office responded to 124 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. The Coroner's Office assisted the Council on Aging with 19 county cremations and 1 county burial.

The BCCO continues to work with Legacy of Hope and the Eye Bank to assist with organ donation. The BCCO assisted with 49 tissue harvests in 2019. 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.

As we move into 2020, the office will continue to maintain its response time of 1-hour county wide. The office will rigorously advance the educational status of its investigators as well as advise the public as to the scope of work performed by the Office of the Coroner. We should achieve Accreditation through IAC&ME by July 2020. We will seek legislation to allow the Baldwin County Commission to effect change for the Coroner's Office with respect to salary and needed changes to assist with a growing county. A training manual for Interns and Deputy Coroners will also be developed to assist with education and standards. As Baldwin County grows, so should our ability to serve it.

I would respectfully submit this FY 2019 report to the Commission, along with the attached spreadsheet.

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.

Dr. Brian Pierce, D-ABMDI

Coroner

01-15-2020