

Annual Report for FY 2020-2021



Dr. Brian Pierce, DC, D-ABMDI

Coroner-Baldwin County, Alabama



Baldwin County Coroner's Office Annual Report FY 2020-2021

Background:

The Baldwin County Coroner's Office (BCCO) covers over 2000 square miles within Baldwin County and serves some 231,000 residents as well as 6.5 Million Tourists annually. Coroner, Dr. Brian Pierce appointed 5 Deputy Coroners to assist him with his duties and the County Commission provided 2 administrative assistants. Phones are answered 24 hours/day, 365 days a year. 1282 deaths were reported to the Coroner's Office in FY2020-21.

Challenges with the Covid Pandemic continued in 2021. The Coroner's Office experienced our highest one-month case total to date with 102 cases in August 2021. However, we were much better prepared to deal with the pandemic in terms of supplies and protocols in 2021 verses any previous time. New lessons were learned, and preparations are underway to deal with a large volume of calls in a short period.

In March of 2021 the Baldwin County Coroner's Office received Accreditation from the International Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners (IACME), only the second Coroner's Office in the State of Alabama to achieve this designation. Accreditation ensures that nationally set standards of Death Investigation are followed and operations of the office meet all criteria put forth by our national organizations.

The following report includes statistical analysis of unattended and unexpected deaths that occurred in Baldwin County from October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021.

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 following situations regarding deaths, that are to be reported to the Office of the Coroner:

*Disease which may be hazardous or contagious or which may constitute a threat to the health of the public

- From external violence, an unexplained cause, or under suspicious circumstances
- Where no physician is in attendance, or where, though in attendance, the physician is unable to certify the cause of death
- From thermal, chemical, or radiation injury
- From criminal abortion
- While in the custody of law enforcement officials or while incarcerated in a public institution
- When the death was sudden and happened to a person who was in good health
- From an industrial accident or any death suspected to be involved with the decedent's occupation
- When death occurs in a hospital less than 24 hours after admission to a hospital or after any invasive procedure
- Any death suspected to be due to alcohol intoxication or the result of exposure to drugs or toxic agents
- Any death due to neglect or suspected neglect

- Any stillbirth of 20 or more weeks gestational age unattended by a physician
- Any maternal death to include death of a pregnant woman regardless of the length of the pregnancy, even where the cause of death is unrelated to the pregnancy
- Any death of an infant or child where the medical history has not established a significant pre-existing condition

FY 2020-21 the Office of the Coroner had the following Staffing:

Dr. Brian Pierce DC, D-ABMDI: Coroner

Investigations

Troy Dyess, D-ABMDI: Chief Deputy Coroner

Daren Montgomery: Deputy Coroner

Nick Miller: Deputy Coroner

Tim Allen: Deputy Coroner

Tim Cooper: Deputy Coroner

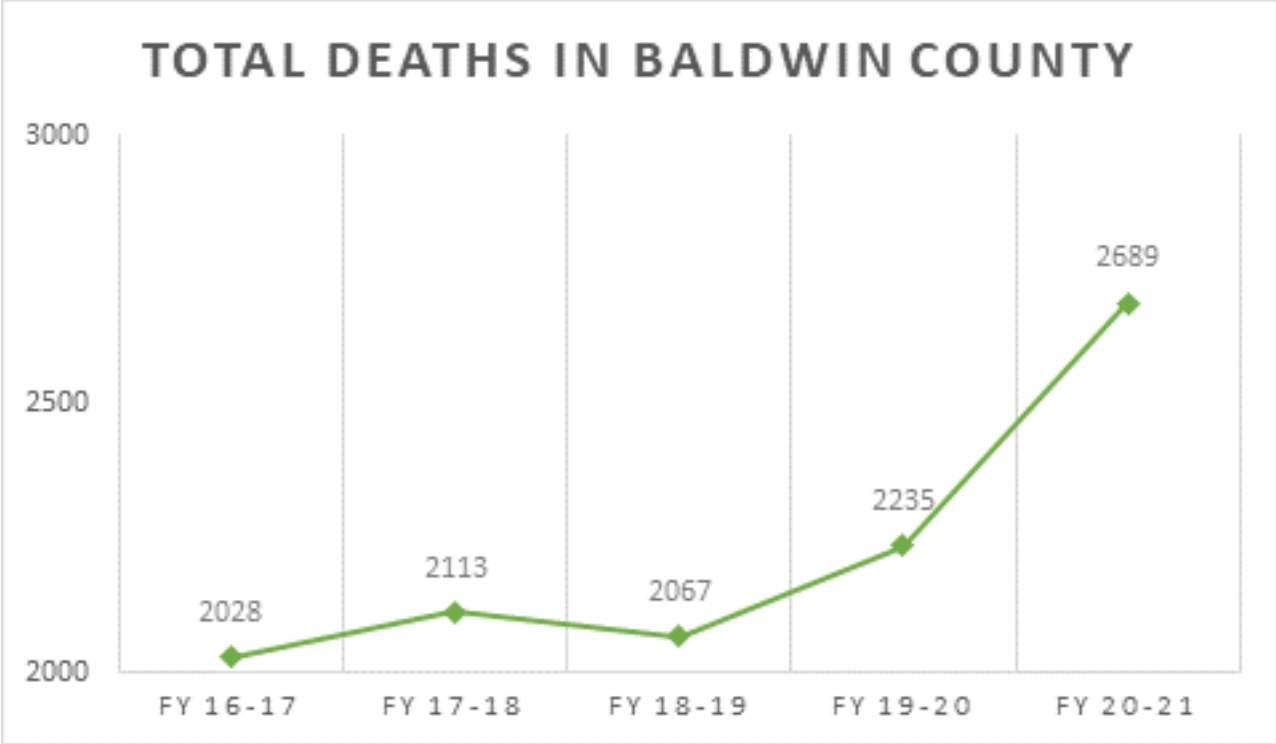
Administration

Brandy Byrd: Administrative Support Specialist III

Shanna Bonner: Administrative Support Specialist I

Stan Vinson: Accreditation Consultant

Deputy Coroners currently serve as Temporary Employees through SARPC. SARPC provides temporary employees Workers Compensation Benefits and some Mental Health Benefits as well.



- 32.5% increase in past 5 years

Breakdown of Coroner Cases

Natural	487	
Drug Deaths	74	
Suicides	40	*4 Overdosed
Blunt Force	35	*MVA/ Fall from Height
Drownings	7	
Homicides	9	
Fire Deaths	5	
Other	4	
Undetermined	6	
TOTAL	<u>663</u>	

Cases Reported to the Baldwin County Coroner's Office

***2689 Deaths, 1282 were reported to our office**

1282 Cases

Non-Coroner Cases	83	*Under a Doctor's care
Coroner Cases w/ Investigation	663	
232 sent for Autopsy		
431 Medical Record Review		
Hospice Deaths	536	

***2689 Deaths, 1282 were reported to our office**

October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021

***663 Cases accepted for Investigation**

	# of Cases / Total Deaths	% of Deaths
FY 18-19	479/2067	= 24% of all deaths
FY 19-20	562/2235	= 26% of all deaths
FY 20-21	663/2689	= 25% of all deaths



***88 % increase from FY 12-13**

Cases Sent for Autopsy: 232 (34.99% of Coroner Cases)

Medical Record Review Only: 431 (65% of Coroner Cases)

Gender: Males – 432 (65.16% of Coroner Cases)

Females – 231 (34.84% of Coroner Cases)

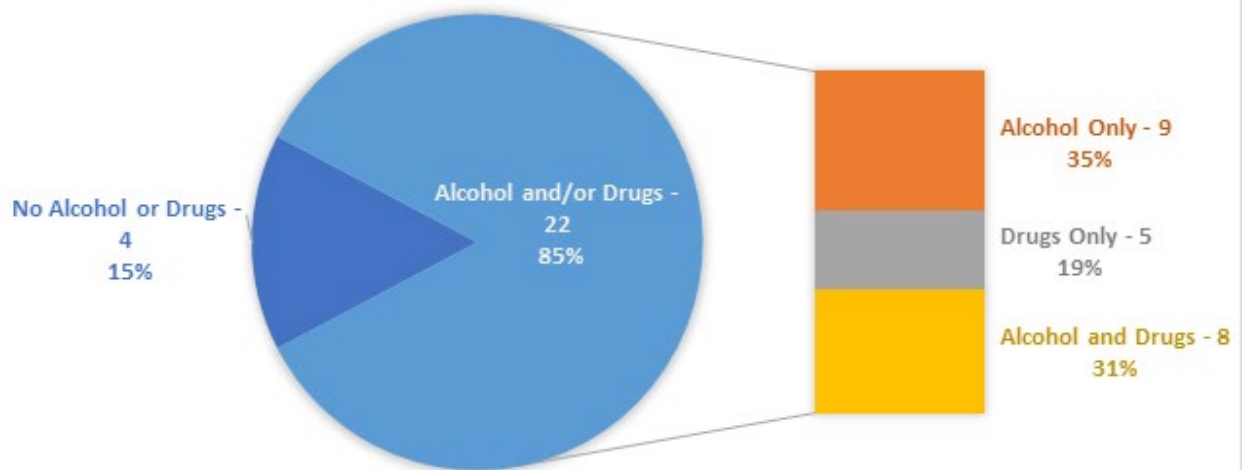
		% of Baldwin County Residents
Race:	Caucasian – 579 (87.33% of Coroner Cases)	83%
	Black – 71 (10.71% of Coroner Cases)	9%
	Hispanic – 11 (1.66% of Coroner Cases)	5%
	Other – 2 (0.30% of Coroner Cases)	3%

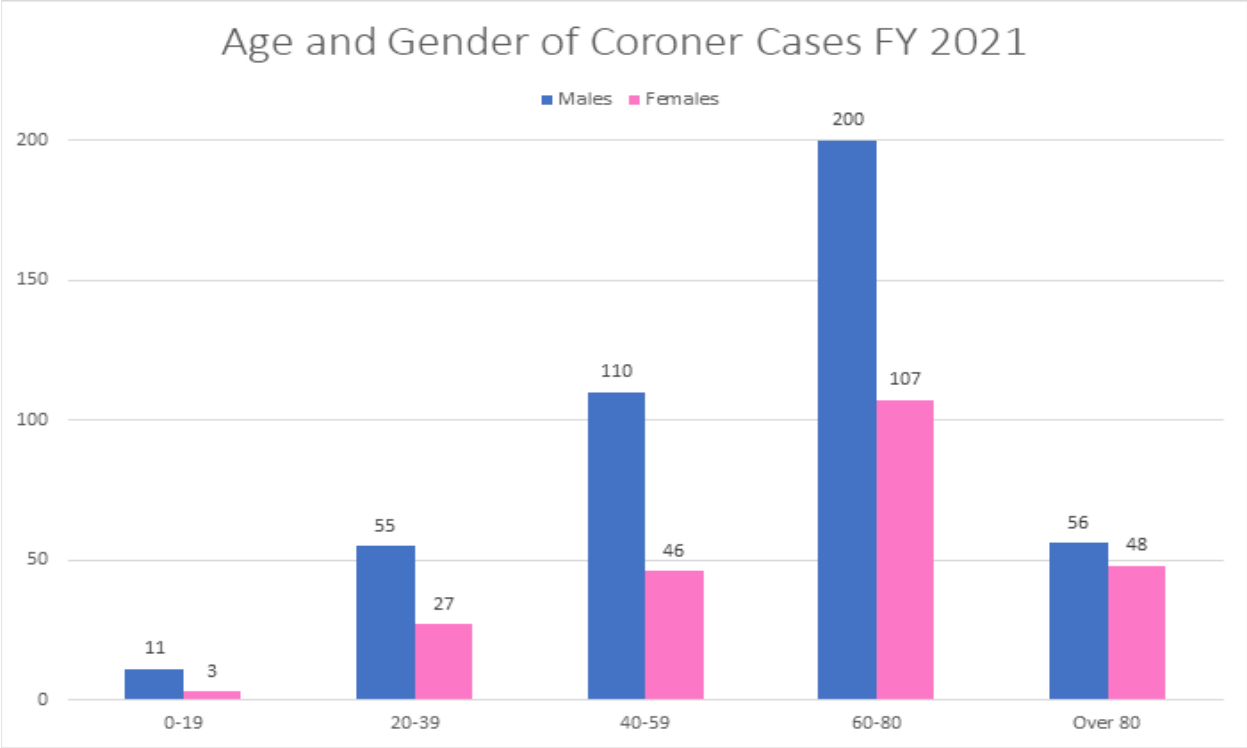
Transportation Fatalities

Motor Vehicle	25
Motorcycle	1
Total	26

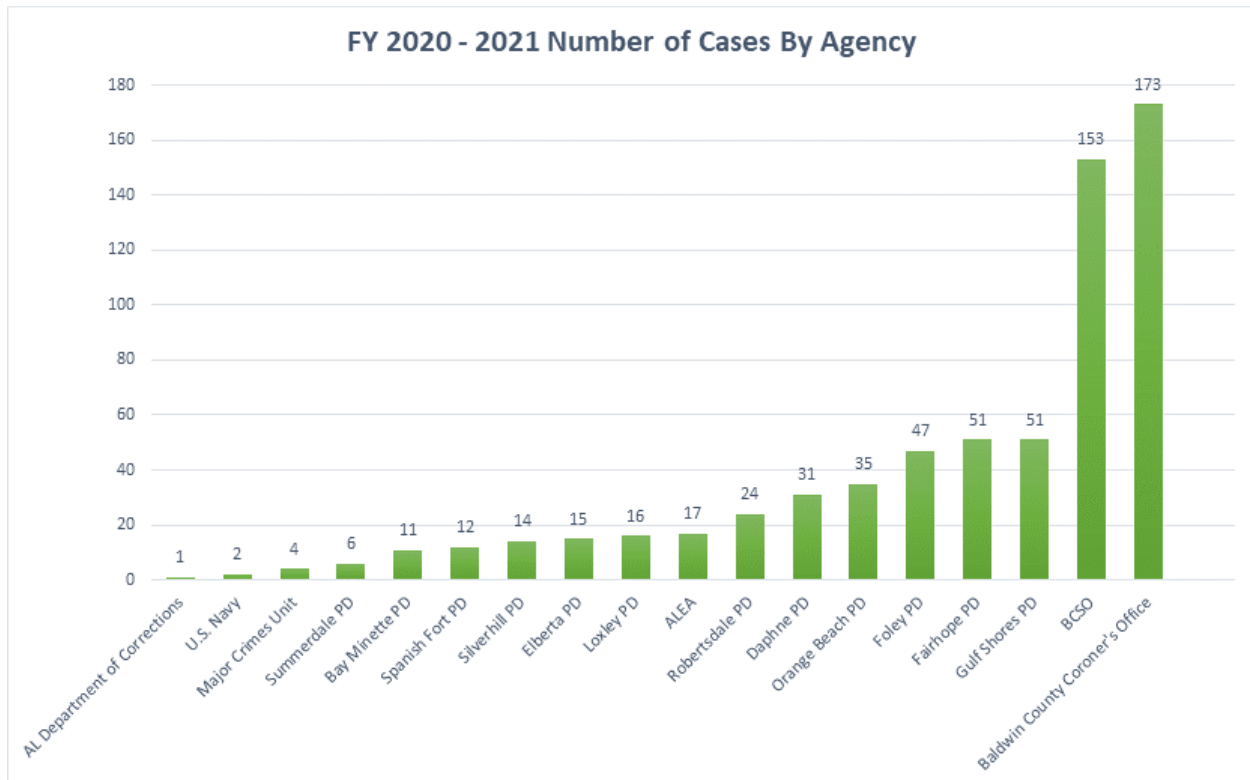
Seatbelt Usage in Motor Vehicle Fatalities	
Seatbelt Used	7
Seatbelt Not Used	5
Unknown if Seatbelt Used	13

TOXICOLOGIES IN TRANSPORTATION FATALITY CASES





Death Investigation by Agency



The Baldwin County Coroner's Office assisted 16 agencies with investigations of death that occurred in Baldwin County. The Office also handled 173 death investigations that had no Law Enforcement involvement, these occurred mostly from emergency rooms.

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. Accreditation by IACME
2. Met with Strategic Planning committee to begin the process of growth from an Office to an Agency.
3. Deputy Coroners were moved from Contract status to SARPC, as Temporary Employees, thus affording them workers compensation protection as well as compensation adjustments to pay scale.
4. Began process of Mass Fatality Training with EMA
5. Adjusted protocols and supply chain issues to deal with the Pandemic, Covid-19
6. Continued to work with the Legacy of Hope to assist families with tissue donation.

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 timely, accurately and without bias.

The BCCO was responsible for taking custody of 420 bodies, of which 232 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 188 bodies for families from out of state or for cases needing a medical record review.

Transportation costs for the 2020-21 FY was \$118,925.00, up from \$104,225.00 the previous year. Likely a direct result of the increased case load. However, the County was reimbursed 67% or \$79,900.00 from Cities and Towns that had deaths requiring transportation to the Morgue or to ADFS.

The Coroner's office responded to 172 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 20 County Cremations, a significant increase from 9 cases in FY19-20.

The BCCO along with the Baldwin County Commission, signed a Facility Use Agreement with the Legacy of Hope. This has allowed the County to receive revenues from the Coroner's assistance with tissue donations. The BCCO assisted with 190 Tissue harvests in FY2020-2021. The BCCO assists 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 2022, the office will continue to maintain its response time of 1-hour county wide. Continue to advance the educational status of its investigators as well as the public as to the scope of work performed by the Office of the Coroner. Maintain our recent Accreditation by IACME and work closely with our community partners to assist families who are dealing with unexpected deaths and work to prevent common accidental deaths.

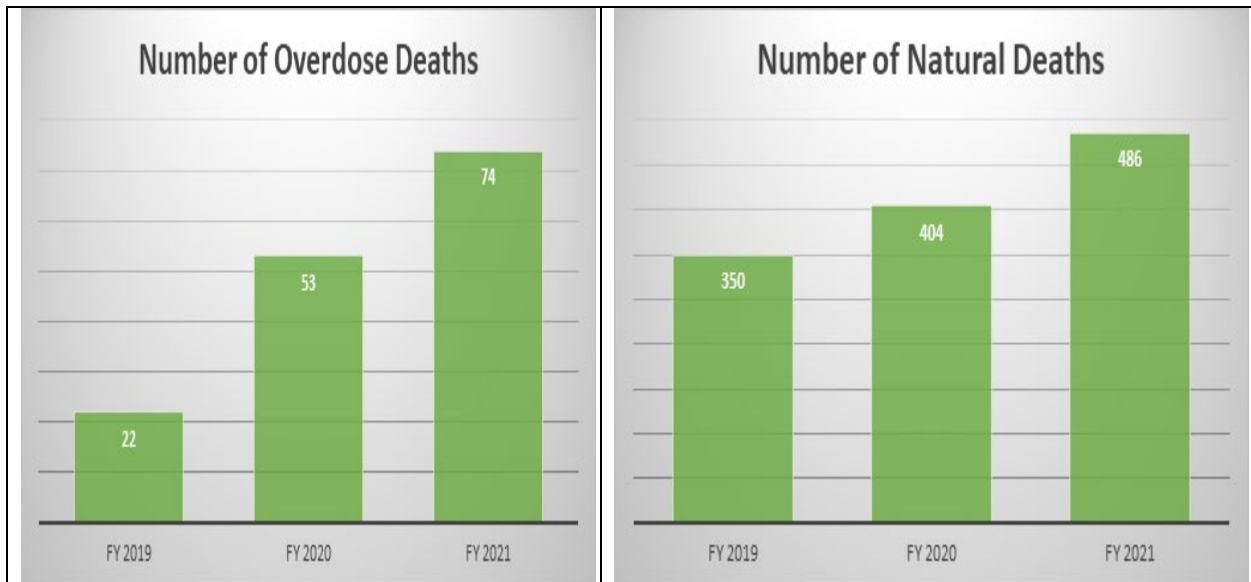
We will continue to assist the Baldwin County Narcotic Homicide unit by providing rapid drug testing for Drug related cases.

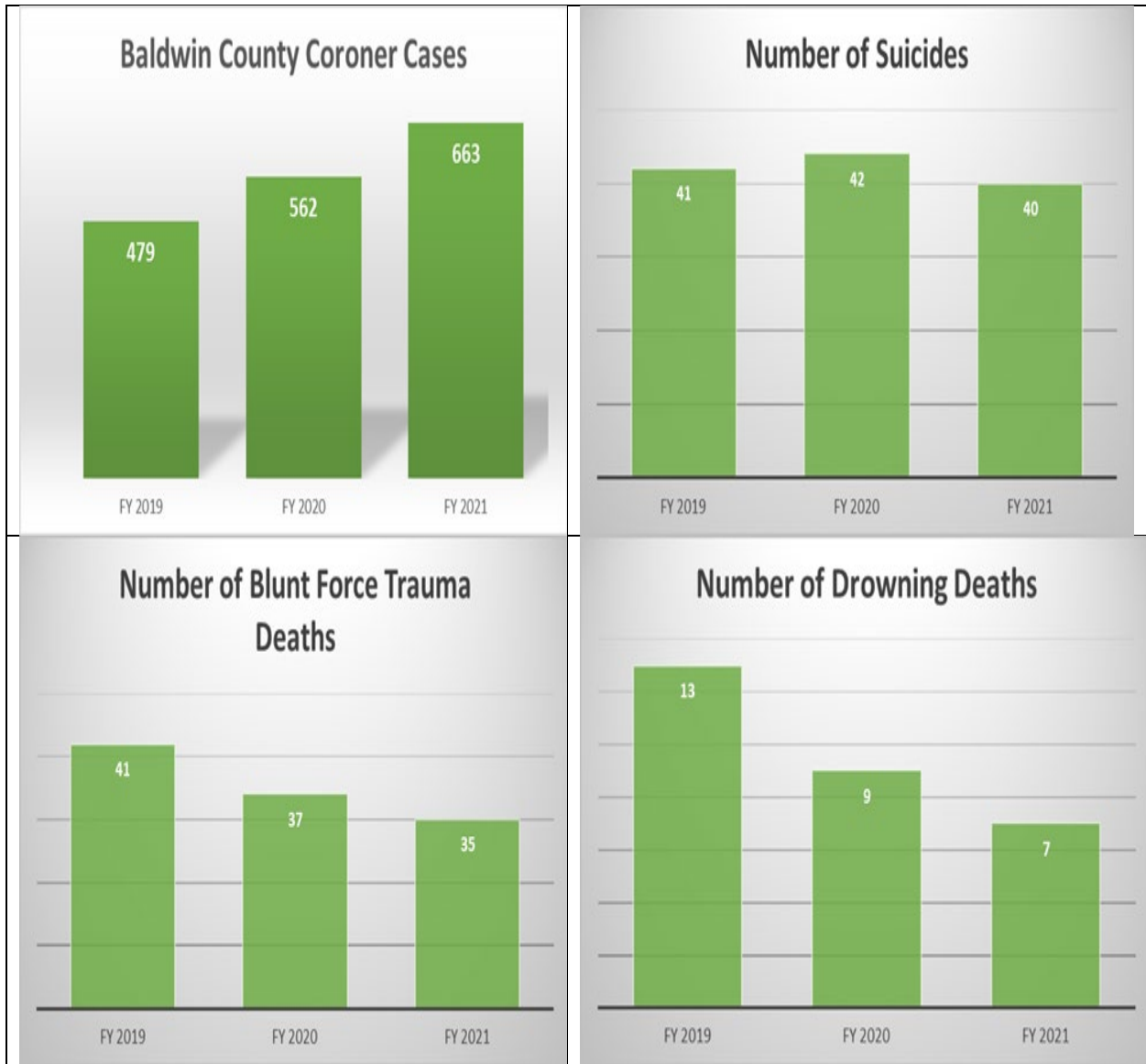
With tourism being important to Baldwin County, it is noteworthy to mention 13% of the Coroner cases were non-residents. We will continue to monitor this trend both moving

forward and retro-actively to evaluate the impact of tourism on the services provided by the Coroner's office.

We will work diligently toward achieving the Strategic Goal put forth by the County Commission at the recent Planning meeting: **“For Baldwin County to experience a Coroner's Office that is prepared to serve its functional population and is prepared for a Mass Casualty Incident”**. As Baldwin County grows, so should our ability to serve it.

****Point of Interest:** The Increase number of deaths seen by the Coroner's office for FY-20-21, again did not seem to be directly related to the Covid Pandemic, but rather indirectly due to delayed medical care as well as Drug related deaths. Natural Deaths surged to **487** (404, FY19-20), and Drug related deaths increased to **74** (53 in FY19-20). However, suicides, MVA's, and drownings all remained relatively constant over the past 3 years.





I would respectfully submit this FY 2022 report to the Commission, along with the attached spreadsheet.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brian Pierce, DC, D-ABMDI
Coroner of Baldwin County

1-11-2022