

Minutes of the Fourth Circuit Medical Examiner Search Committee
2 p.m., Aug. 13, 2018
State Attorney's Office, 311 W. Monroe St., Jacksonville, Florida

Members Present

State Attorney Melissa Nelson, Fourth Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office
State Attorney Jeff Siegmeister, Third Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office
Candice Brower, Regional Counsel of the Office of Criminal Conflict and Civil Regional
Counsel, 1st DCA Region
Honorable Gayward Hendry, Clay County Commissioner, District 5
Sheriff Mark Hunter, Columbia County
Sheriff Harrell Reid, Columbia County
Chief James Hurley, Fernandina Beach Police Department
Chief Michelle Cook, Atlantic Beach Police Department
Sheriff Bill Leeper, Nassau County
Director Ron Lendvay, Jacksonville Sheriff's Office (for Sheriff Mike Williams)
Public Defender Blair Payne, Third Judicial Circuit
Chief Assistant Lewis Buzzell, Fourth Judicial Circuit Public Defender's Office (For Public
Defender Charlie Cofer)
David Rice, MD
Rose Walker, Holmes-Glover-Soloman
Stephen Nelson, Florida Medical Examiners Commission

Others present

Tim Crutchfield, District Four Medical Examiner's Office
Stephen Siegel, Fourth Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office
David Chapman, Fourth Judicial Circuit State Attorney's Office
Andrew Pantazi, Florida Times-Union
Diane Moser, City of Jacksonville Manager of Employee Services
Tracy Bolton, City of Jacksonville Personnel Services

Meeting

The meeting led off with introductions of several new members or stand-ins present (Walker, Lendvay, Reed) who were not present at the July meeting.

Stephen Siegel, Fourth Circuit SAO First Assistant, moderated the meeting and led off with a PowerPoint presentation that highlighted the nationwide workforce challenges confronting County Medical Examiner Offices. The presentation highlighted the dwindling numbers of

practicing forensic pathologists in the United States as well as the recent increased workload across the nation due to the opioid epidemic. (See PowerPoint for more detail.)

Discussion shifted to salary. Specifically, the Committee discussed whether the salary range was competitive and should be raised. The current salary range is \$210,000-\$300,713.

The City currently has budgeted \$280,000 for the position for fiscal 2018-19. Diane Moser, City of Jacksonville Director of Employee Services, explained how the city can increase the salary based on market comparisons and merit.

Dr. Stephen Nelson noted that Volusia County also is in the market for a medical examiner. Additionally, he commented that the Fourth Circuit position was competing with other jurisdictions nationwide and suggested a \$300,000 salary was “low ball” and could result in the position needing to be filled every few years. A brief discussion was had about a private vs. public Medical Examiner’s Office, but it was determined that was outside the role of the Committee. Having a range too low would discourage applicants from inquiring and undermine credibility, while having one too high could be costly, some members said.

Chief James Hurley asked when current Chief Medical Examiner Dr. Valerie Rao’s last day was scheduled, with State Attorney Melissa Nelson telling the Committee that it is Aug. 31.

Discussion shifted back to the potential compensation package, with members asking whether the City could provide non-salary perks, such as covering moving expenses. Dr. Stephen Nelson opined that these should already be part of any compensation package.

Moser told the Committee that all associate Medical Examiner positions, five in total, are filled. Public Defender Blair Payne inquired if any were certified, while Chief Michelle Cook asked whether there was any benefit to increasing the number of associates and their pay as a selling feature to the chief job.

Siegel said the City is aware of the hiring process and the seriousness of the situation — a worst-case scenario is that when October or November arrives, there are no applicants. Members discussed and decided that it would be best to use a numerical range for salary rather than stating that salary was commensurate with experience. Rao began the position with a salary of about \$235,000, which has been increased to \$286,000 during her interim tenure. Discussion shifted to the idea of using a professional consultant to conduct a salary study, as such a study would identify and explain what a fair salary would be. Dr. Nelson countered that a study would take too much time and any advertisement would not be ready in time for the

National Association of Medical Examiners conference in October. Melissa Nelson said that she and State Attorney Jeff Siegmeister are working diligently to find an interim person upon Rao's departure.

Commissioner Gayward Hendry suggested that more money should be "put on the table" to attract a Medical Examiner. He suggested the position should not be overpaid, but the salary also should not be low. Chief Hurley asked whether it was possible to "grow" an associate into the full-time role. Dr. Nelson responded that Melissa Nelson and Siegmeister were identifying an interim that could "road test" the position – it was also noted that Rao was an interim who continued in the role.

As for the interim, Melissa Nelson and Siegmeister — not the Committee — are discussing possible candidates. That process is not subject to Florida's Sunshine Laws and is not within the charge of the Committee.

Melissa Nelson inquired about the process of increasing the advertised range. Moser said a position may be increased two "grades" on the administrative level. Any grade increase beyond this would require a more in-depth administrative review followed by City Council approval. A two-grade increase would increase the salary ceiling to \$343,000.

After a motion by Sheriff Mark Hunter and seconded by others, the Committee unanimously voted to recommend increasing the salary cap (absent benefits) to \$343,000. The motion was approved. Siegel agreed to draft a letter to the city summarizing the Committee's recommendations for the solicitation and the proposed salary range.

Discussion then shifted to the marketing materials prepared by the City to solicit for the position. Suggestions were made to focus on the attractive features about the city and surrounding areas.

The meeting adjourned shortly after this discussion.