

DEPARTMENT OF THE MEDICAL EXAMINER

KA 'OIHANA O KE KAUKA KILO KUPAPA'U

CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU

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RICK BLANGIARDI
MAYOR
MEIA



MASAHIKO KOBAYASHI, M.D., Ph.D.
MEDICAL EXAMINER
KAUKA KILO KUPAPA'U

March 13, 2024

The Honorable Radiant Cordero, Chair
and Members
Committee on Budget
Honolulu City Council
530 South King Street, Room 202
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear Chair Cordero and Councilmembers:

SUBJECT: Department of the Medical Examiner – Budget Presentation

Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's Budget. Attached you will find the presentation that was provided to the Salary Commission as promised.

I sincerely apologize for misspeaking the salary for the Deputy Medical Examiner position. The salary amount I gave (\$300,000 – 500,000) was the amount after the cost of living adjustment (\$354,168 – \$679,364 to be exact). The actual salary was between \$244,296 and \$396,386. Please see the tables 1 and 2 (pages 11 and 12) in the attached presentation.

Should you have any questions, please call me at (808) 768-3063 or email mkobayashi@honolulu.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "mkobayashi".

Digitally signed by
Kobayashi, Masahiko
Date: 2024.03.13
07:52:53 -10'00'

Masahiko Kobayashi, M.D., Ph.D.
Medical Examiner

Attachment

APPROVED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "mformby".

Michael D. Formby
Managing Director

DEPT. COM. 185

BUD

Unsuccessful recruitment for Deputy Medical Examiner position

Salary Commission (January 23, 2024)

Department of the Medical Examiner (MED)

Masahiko Kobayashi, MD, PhD

Medical Examiner

Salary Commission 2023

- Salary Commission discussed the salary inversion problem of Deputy Medical Examiner (DME).
 - DME position has been vacant since November 2019.
 - Increase in salary recommended (\$273,024 → \$354,168)
 - FY 2024-25 salary for forensic pathologists

Position	Salary (FY24)	Salary (FY25)
Medical Examiner	\$363,144	-
Deputy Medical Examiner	\$354,168	-
Civil service Forensic Pathologist (3 positions – all filled in March 2023)	\$330,552* (Base pay \$144,420, Retention incentive \$186,132)	\$335,736* (Base pay \$149,604, Retention incentive \$186,132)

*Salary set for pathologists with 7 or more years of experience

Recruitment for DME position

- Resumed in July 2023:
 - Increased salary amount \$354,168
 - Added relocation incentive \$20,000

DEPUTY CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

\$354,168 yearly

An appointed non-civil service position responsible for assisting in the oversight of the agency and administrative tasks.
The position is considered to be part of the Mayor's cabinet.

Deputy Chief Medical Examiner Duties Include:

- Conducting approximately 100-200 autopsies per year when fully staffed
- Managing the Department of the Medical Examiner
- Attending Mayor's cabinet meetings
- Participating in city-related activities
- Working towards NAME accreditation



Position Requirements:

- Must be a United States citizen
- Graduation from an accredited school of medicine with a degree of Doctor of Medicine or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, completion of an approved pathology residency training at a recognized institution
- Certification by the American Board of Pathology in Anatomic or Forensic Pathology
Certification in both Anatomic and Forensic Pathology preferred
- Current license to practice medicine in the State of Hawaii, prior to appointment
- Desirable: Several years of experience as a practicing Forensic Pathologist

Highlights of the Department of the Medical Examiner:

- Lodox full body X-ray imaging
- On site histology
- Toxicology testing currently provided by NMS Labs with short turnaround time
- Consultants available:
Neuropathology, Pediatric Pathology, Forensic Anthropology and Odontology
- Partnership with University of Hawaii, John A. Burns School of Medicine
- Low homicide rate
- Facility under renovation
- One fully funded conference annually
- Fees paid for American Board of Pathology Continuing Certification Program and some continuing medical education programs



How to Apply:

Email curriculum vitae and cover letter to:

✉ Recruitment@honolulu.gov

Attention:
Nola N. Miyasaki, Director
Department of Human Resources
City and County of Honolulu

Please contact the City and County of Honolulu's Medical Examiner, Dr. Masahiko Kobayashi, M.D., Ph. D., at mikobayashi@honolulu.gov for position details and available relocation incentives.



Advertisement placed on National Association of Medical Examiners website

Recruitment for DME position – current FP

- Current civil service Forensic Pathologists were asked.
 - Two pathologists had already told me they were not interested.
 - Enjoyed forensic pathology work but did not like management/supervision
 - One of them was non-US citizen.
- The newest pathologist - Joined MED in March 2023
 - Had experience in management/supervision, great personality
 - He was not interested in DME.
 - “The primary reason I left (his previous workplace) was because I did not enjoy the administrative aspects and overseeing people. That’s why this job has been a great fit for me at this time in my life.”

Recruitment for DME position

- An applicant for DME (August 2023)
 - 5 years of experience: Shorter than our Forensic Pathologists (7-10 years)
 - As we were going to conduct an interview, the application was withdrawn.
 - “The risks of a relocation may be too great for our family.”

Pathologist shortage - again

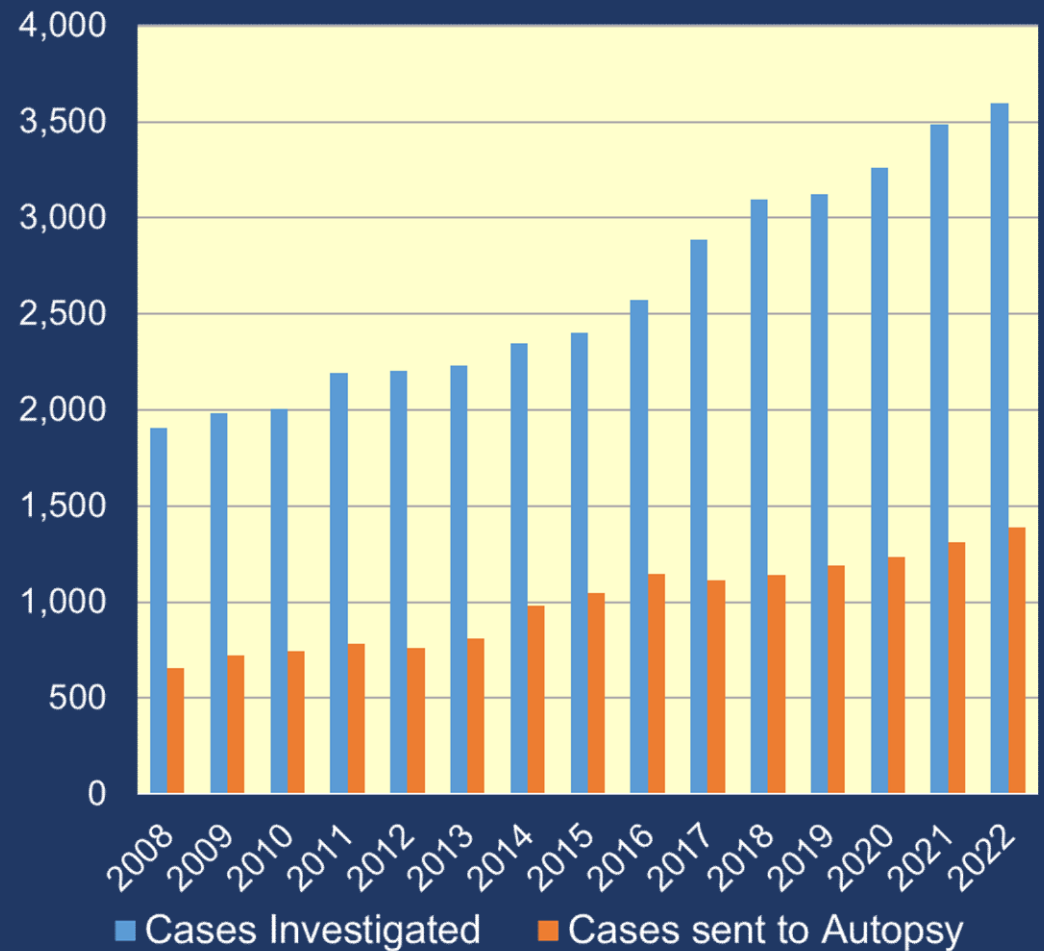
- The newest pathologist resigned in September 2023.
 - Reason: His spouse could not get a job in Honolulu, and their parents were getting older in the mainland.

Recruitment for civil service Forensic Pathologist position

- Concurrent recruitment for civil service Forensic Pathologist position
 - Compensation
 - Salary tiers \$295,000 – \$325,000 based on experience and additional board certification
 - Relocation incentive \$20,000
 - Two applicants
 - One with 2 years of experience, the other still in training
 - Salary set as \$295,000
 - Added bonus \$10,740 (after completion of each year, for the first 3 years)
 - Both of them turned down our offer.
 - Reason: Problems in their spouse's job and cost of living concern

Current situation

- Both DME and civil service Forensic Pathologist positions are open.
- The least number of forensic pathologists to handle the current caseload should be 4.
 - Now we have only 3 = **unsustainable**
 - If we are down to 2 for any reason, this department is literally over.



Why our DME position cannot be filled?

- Nationwide shortage of forensic pathologists
 - About 40-70 medical examiner/coroner's offices are always recruiting.
 - An experienced forensic pathologist is hard to come by.
- Management/supervision work is never popular among pathologists.
- Disadvantage of Honolulu – High cost of living
 - Salary Commission's Salary Study – DME salary is competitive
 - Agree on the salary amount being competitive
 - But mainland pathologists consider cost of living (not cost of labor this study factored in) = Extremely discouraging factor
 - Many doctors have student loan debt – They may be attracted to a job with high salary with low cost of living.

Table 1: Comparison of forensic pathologist salaries among the cities/state that are relatively expensive to live and with less than 4 million population in the county/state.

City, State	County/ state Population (million)	Salary			Equivalent salary in Honolulu*		
		Chief Medical Examiner	Deputy Chief Medical Examiner	Forensic Pathologist	Chief Medical Examiner	Deputy Chief Medical Examiner	Forensic Pathologist
Honolulu, HI	1	\$363,144	\$354,168	\$330,552	\$363,144	\$354,168	\$330,552
Boston, MA	0.8	\$429,687	\$302,113		\$525,335	\$369,363	
San Diego, CA	3.3	\$340,198	\$247,416 - \$396,386	\$253,656 - \$282,859	\$430,790	\$313,301 - \$501,941	\$321,203 - \$358,182
San Francisco, CA	0.8	\$404,044	-	\$274,300 - \$386,022	\$424,234	-	\$288,007 - \$405,312
San Jose, CA	1.9	\$459,624	-	\$405,554 - \$408,872	\$475,410	-	\$419,483 - \$422,915
Denver, CO	0.7	\$356,337	-	\$188,890 - \$321,113	\$581,663	-	\$308,333 - \$524,165
Connecticut	3.6	\$445,267	\$391,001	\$313,237 - \$376,182	\$773,651	\$679,364	\$544,249 - \$653,616

* Bankrate.com Cost of Living Comparison Calculator is used to find an equivalent salary in Honolulu. The calculator states, "To maintain your current standard of living in Honolulu, HI, you need to earn:"

Table 2: Comparison of Deputy Chief Medical Examiner salaries among counties that are conducting open recruitment or apparently had recent recruitment.

City, State	County population (million)	Deputy Chief Medical Examiner salary	Equivalent salary in Honolulu*
Honolulu	1	\$354,168	\$354,168
Orlando, FL	1.4	\$244,296	\$433,637
Colorado Springs, CO	0.7	\$261,862	\$438,540
Charleston, WV	0.2	\$255,000	\$527,818
Biloxi, MS	0.2	\$265,000	\$568,037
Phoenix, AZ	4.5	\$250,000 - \$337,500	\$439,018 - \$592,675
Reno, NV	0.5	\$263,660 - \$341,203	\$458,109 - \$592,840
Suburban Atlanta (DeKalb Co), GA	0.8	\$290,000 - \$325,000	\$529,858 - \$593,807
Green Bay, WI	0.3	\$297,710	\$595,750
Knoxville, TN	0.5	\$309,113	\$645,742
Suburban Jackson (Pearl), MS	0.2	\$275,000 - \$310,000	\$574,480 - \$647,595

* Bankrate.com Cost of Living Comparison Calculator is used to find an equivalent salary in Honolulu. The calculator states, "To maintain your current standard of living in Honolulu, HI, you need to earn:"

Why our DME position cannot be filled?

- DME has multiple additional duties on top of daily casework
 - City-related work (shared with ME):
 - Attending cabinet meetings twice a month
 - Participating in city-related activities as an appointee
 - Department-related work (shared with ME):
 - Attending management meetings once a week
 - Supervising 3 forensic pathologists, 2 medical technologists, and 4 autopsy technicians: Performance evaluation
 - Updating policies and procedures – work on NAME accreditation
 - Safety officer – holding safety committee meetings, conducting safety training and inspection
 - Personnel – hiring process, investigation, discipline, updating position description, etc.
 - Purchasing – managing grant, conducting procurement (including toxicology, body transport, purchase of expensive items), managing contracts (including experts including per diem doctors, forensic anthropologist, forensic odontologist, scuba gear inspection, etc.), purchasing necessary items with p-card and other methods, attending monthly meeting with Purchasing department
 - Budgeting: Work along the city's budget cycle, attending council meetings February/March, departmental personnel planning
 - Managing fiscal/spending
 - Building renovation-related issues
 - May work on former chief's backlog reports (difficult cases remaining)
 - Attend various meetings
 - Making lectures, presentations, etc. when asked
 - Troubleshooting – a lot of urgent tasks fall into this category

Why our DME position cannot be filled?

- Unlike civil service Forensic Pathologist, job security is not guaranteed
 - Appointed by Mayor
 - No guarantee for reappointment at the time of Mayoral election
 - DME has a high level of job security due to its specialized nature, and applicants have to understand that.

Why our DME position cannot be filled?

- At this point, both DME position and civil service Forensic Pathologist position are open.
- Candidates may compare: Which job is more attractive?

Position	Salary (FY24)	Salary (FY25)	
Deputy Medical Examiner	\$354,168	-	Additional work/responsibility Lack of job security
Civil Service Forensic Pathologist	\$330,552*	\$335,736*	Casework only

*Salary set for pathologists with 7 or more years of experience

What is the salary amount that makes this recruitment successful?

- Any increase in DME salary would help the recruitment.
- I do not have a good answer for the exact salary amount.
- As Medical Examiner, I feel a conflict in advocating for a specific salary amount – DME's compensation and mine can be tied.

Thank you

- We will continue recruitment as aggressively as possible.