

**STATE OF MARYLAND**  
**POST MORTEM EXAMINERS COMMISSION**  
**FORENSIC MEDICAL CENTER**  
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The Honorable Joseline A. Pena-Melnyk  
Chair, Health and Government Operations Committee  
Room 241  
House Office Building  
Annapolis, MD 21401

March 9, 2023

**RE: HB 977 – Department of Health – Office of the Chief Medical Examiner – Letter of Support with Amendment**

Dear Chair Pena-Melnyk:

HB 977 renames the State Postmortem Examiners Commission to be the Postmortem Examiners Advisory Committee (“Committee”) and places powers previously performed by the Commission with the Maryland Department of Health (“Department”) and the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (“Office”). The bill also requires the Secretary of the Department to consult with the Committee on matters related to the employment of the Chief Medical Examiner and prohibits the Department and the Committee from interfering with clinical findings and conclusions of the Office.

The Maryland State Postmortem Examiners Commission (the “Commission”) supports HB 977 with amendment.

This bill as introduced will allow for a more efficient process in handling human resources, budget, staffing, and operations of the Office. The bill reflects the reality that under the current law the Commission’s work requires the Department’s funding and allocation of resources. It streamlines processes by placing authority to implement all of the Commission’s former responsibilities including appointing authority for the chief medical examiner, deputy chiefs and assistant medical examiners; chief toxicologist; deputy chief, lead, and assistant toxicologists; serologist; forensic pathology residents; chief forensic investigator; deputy chiefs, lead, and assistant forensic investigators; autopsy services supervisor; and deputy, lead, and assistant autopsy technicians under the auspices of the Department. The bill as currently worded requires the Commission to ensure staffing levels are maintained. The Commission is in support of this bill with an amendment that makes it clear the Department, not the Commission, is solely responsible for ensuring that the number of staff does not fall to a level that would constitute a Phase II violation according to the National of Medical Examiners. This amendment is necessary as it ensures this authority consistently lies with the Department.

Amendment - On page 6, line 7, strike “by the Commission”. Insert “at the Office”.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. The Commission respectfully requests a favorable report on HB 977 with proposed amendment.

If you have any additional questions, please contact the Commission's Chair, Sanford Stass, M.D. at [sstass@som.umaryland.edu](mailto:sstass@som.umaryland.edu) and Vice Chair Ralph Hruban, M.D at [rhruban@jhmi.edu](mailto:rhruban@jhmi.edu).

**The concerns of the Commission expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect that of the Department of Health or the Administration.**