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Stephan W. Currie, Executive Director

Feb. 20, 2019

Chairman James Lower and Members  
House Local Government and Municipal Finance Committee  
124 N. Capitol Ave.  
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Chairman Lower and Committee Members,

The Michigan Association of Counties supports House Bill 4124, which would allow a county Medical Examiner (ME) in a county with a population of under 50,000 the ability to hire an agent or employee of a funeral establishment as a medical examiner investigator.

It is no secret that the opioid epidemic has imposed new burdens on county offices, from law enforcement to child welfare. The Office of the Medical Examiner is no exception. In 2014, there were 93,527 deaths among Michigan residents and more than 32,000 of those cases were referred to the local Medical Examiner's offices. In 2014, a reported 1,080 deaths in Michigan were due to opioid-related overdoses. But by 2016, that figure was 1,840 — a 70 percent increase. While responses are under way, and are having an effect, the number of opioid-related deaths continues to rise.

Under current law, the county ME can appoint medical examiner investigators to assist in carrying out the duties required under Public Act 181 of 1953. It is the county ME's responsibility to assess the qualifications of the investigators, taking into consideration the person's education, training or experience. The county ME is responsible for determining the duties assigned to the medical examiner investigator.

HB 4124 will be another tool for MEs to address this challenge. While it is important to address concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest, as a funeral director or employee may be inclined to refer a family to their funeral home, county MEs have the discretion to work with other funeral homes and ensure they are comfortable with their decision. A possible solution would be the funeral homes agreeing on a fair, scripted brochure for the investigators to use that provides impartial information for the family.

This potential affiliation would still require MEI level qualifications and would help alleviate some of the pressures on county ME. On this basis, MAC supports the bill.

MAC thanks Rep. Triston Cole and his staff for working on this bill to aid counties and help families in mourning to ensure they are being provided timely and prompt services by county ME offices.

Respectfully,

Deena Bosworth  
Director of Governmental Affairs