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**President Preckwinkle Institutes Policy And Procedural Changes At The Cook County
Medical Examiner's Office**

President Preckwinkle today addressed staff and senior management at the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office, announcing policy and procedural changes that will institute stricter controls, accountability and disciplinary measures throughout the department. Today's announcement marks the culmination of a months-long internal review of operations and hiring needs at the ME's office by the president's senior staff.

Shortly after coming into office, President Preckwinkle expressed concern about overall operations at the ME's office, and began efforts toward reorganization, with the goal of greater efficiency. Recent complaints about storage coolers at capacity created an opportunity to take a closer examination of problem areas across the board. The president recognizes the ME's office faces storage challenges related to cuts in state funding and requests to hold deceased remains for extended periods of time – from funeral homes, families, the United States Veteran's Administration, Illinois Public Aid, and the Illinois Public Administrator. In addition, the ME's office accepts indigent and fetal remains under circumstances that many other coroners do not, often creating a storage and burial backlog.

To rectify these conditions, the president will overhaul operations at the ME's office, addressing deficiencies in the areas of personnel, process and policy. Two weeks ago, at the president's direction, executive staff from the Bureau of Administration began a full-scale internal investigation at the ME'S office in order to implement a plan of action. In addition, senior managers are conducting ongoing research and analysis of all deceased remains stored at the ME's office to determine how long they have been there, and why. Expedited burials are planned for the near future, with the first taking place on February 10th.

“My team is systematically tackling the issue we're encountering at the ME's office – from time limits on storage to better intake processes and inventory control,” President Preckwinkle said. “Our goal is to put written policies and procedures in place to increase efficiency and accountability.”

Based on the comprehensive review, planned changes in the area of personnel include:

- Reorganization of senior management to best address administrative needs, including the creation of new positions;
- New progressive disciplinary measures, along with a review of current personnel performance involving disciplinary procedures up to and including discharge;
- More aggressive recruiting and expanded searches for qualified candidates to fill open management positions.

Added protocols and new procedures at the ME's office will ensure greater efficiency and achievement of the public service goals required of all county departments, including:

- Retraining and continuing education of morgue technicians;
- Daily cooler inspections with check-off lists and multiple sign-offs;
- Licensing of new technology programs that help identify next of kin, with the goal of assisting outside agencies in this process and expediting burials.

Additionally, President Preckwinkle will require policies that place time limits on storage of deceased remains pending burial, including:

- Time limits on public aid storage;
- Time limits on families requesting holds due to no burial funds;
- Time limits for the storage of unknown remains.

The entire ME staff will be educated on the new procedures in order to standardize office response and enhance customer service. The new written policies will be given to all employees, with disciplinary consequences for violations.

With these new measures President Preckwinkle is requiring increased diligence and greater accountability from staff to further the mutual goal of maintaining and protecting the dignity of the deceased.

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