

1972 WL 25934 (S.C.A.G.)

Office of the Attorney General

State of South Carolina

February 22, 1972

***1 In Re: Coroners, Utilization of Technical Assistance.**

G. R. Hennigar, M.D.
Professor
Department of Pathology
Medical University of South Carolina
80 Barre Street
Charleston, South Carolina 29401

Dear Dr. Hennigar:

Under the laws of this state a county coroner has the statutory duty of conducting a preliminary investigation into all violent or unexplained deaths occurring in his county. If, after such preliminary investigation, he feels a formal inquest is necessary, he is empowered to empanel a jury, summon witnesses, and inquire formally into the matter. It goes almost without saying, of course, that the coroner may call upon persons with technical training for assistance if he desires to do so.

Each coroner is his own boss, so to speak, and is not working, technically, under the direction or control of any State agency or county governing body. Likewise, a county sheriff, chief of county police, or chief of town or city police has power to investigate matters in which crime might be involved. Neither the coroner nor the police department head has exclusive jurisdiction in the investigation of violent or unexplained deaths occurring within their jurisdictions.

For the most part, I am informed, coroners and police officers cooperate well in these matters— with little reported friction. This is the ideal situation under our law, of course.

I am sure that your Forensic Pathology and Toxicology Service is equipped to render invaluable service in matters pertaining to investigations involving deaths. Even so, however, neither this Office nor any other State agency is empowered to require coroners or local investigating police officers to utilize such service.

Attorney General McLeod sends his deepest regards and asks me to relay to you his appreciation for the valuable work you are doing with the Forensic Pathology and Taxicology Service.

Yours very truly,

Joseph C. Coleman
Deputy Attorney General

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