



Alice Briones, DO
Chief Medical Examiner

OFFICE OF CHIEF MEDICAL EXAMINER

STATE OF MAINE
37 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0037

ocme@maine.gov
Telephone: (207) 624-7180
Fax: (207) 624-7178



Liam Funte, MD, PhD
Deputy Chief Medical Examiner

March 4, 2025

Senator Ingwersen & Representative Meyer
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
132nd Maine Legislature

RE: LD540: An Act to Identify the State's Unidentified Human Remains

Hello. I am Lindsey Chasteen, Office Administrator for the Maine Office of Chief Medical Examiner (OCME). I have worked at the OCME for almost 10 years and am testifying neither for nor against this bill.

The OCME is statutorily responsible (Title 22, Chap. 711) for determining the identities of Maine's decedents that fall under our jurisdiction. Many people come to the OCME with a tentative identification. These individuals are usually too decomposed to conduct visual confirmations, but the circumstances are such that we are not reaching into the dark. An example might be a fisherman who is known to be missing, and several weeks later a body is found in the ocean. We can reasonably assume the decedent is the missing fisherman. We'd first assess if a fingerprint comparison is possible. If not, we'd conduct a direct DNA comparison with missing person's family. This DNA comparison is done at the State Police Crime Lab. There are times when remains are found, and we don't have a tentative identification. These remains are typically single bones, or partial skulls.

Identification methods may include: visual (scars, marks, tattoos), dental, X-rays, fingerprints, or DNA. With our partial skeletons, or single bones, DNA is our only hope. While we start with the State Police Crime Lab for DNA extraction, their capabilities are limited. If the sample is too degraded, or a flat bone such as a skull, state resources are unable to extract DNA. To fund this process through outsourced labs, the OCME has applied for the Bureau of Justice Assistance's grant, the Missing and Unidentified Human Remains (MUHR) Program. Unfortunately, funds are going to larger jurisdictions with hundreds, if not thousands of unidentified people. The most recent funding went to Florida and Texas.

The OCME currently has 28 cases of unidentified remains dating back to 1964. Only two of these cases are full bodies, the rest are partial skeletal remains. If conventional identification methods are unsuccessful (fingerprints, dental, DNA), or the remains do not allow for such methods, we will consider forensic genetic genealogy (FGG). This method of identification is research based, and uses a DNA profile,

uploaded to FamilyTreeDNA (FTDNA) and/or GedMatch to identify possible relatives of the unidentified person. From there, research is done to build out the unidentified person's family tree. The closest "hit" might be a third cousin, so the researchers must work to identify the shared relative, or "downline" of the tree. A case you may be familiar with is Baby Jane Doe, who was found in Frenchville in 1985. She was identified in 2022 using forensic genetic genealogy. It took several years of research, and additional, targeted DNA testing to identify her parents. We worked in collaboration with Maine State Police as this was considered an unsolved homicide.

In the past year, the OCME has been working diligently to identify resources that will help us bring these unidentified remains back to their families. Many of the resources we use are less expensive than traditional testing laboratories because we can't afford the \$8-10K per case price tag these labs charge. We have been working with NOKFinders, an agency who locates next of kin, to fill our gaps in DNA profiles of missing people to ensure we have something to compare our unidentified remains to. NOKFinders does this work for free as they are located in Maine and want to help their community. They have provided the OCME with next of kin information on close to fifty (50) missing people. We have started working with Ramapo College in New Jersey as they have a genetic genealogy program and need cases to work. We have a case with the DNA Doe Project, a largely volunteer organization dedicated to making identifications with FGG. We have a case with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), and a case with Parabon Nanolabs.

Last summer the OCME exhumed two sets of remains that were buried in 1972 and 1973. These remains are believed to be missing fisherman, and there was no DNA on file. Without exhuming these remains, there would be no chance at identification. Both sets of remains produced a partial DNA profile, which is sufficient for making direct DNA comparisons, but is not sufficient for FGG.

We want nothing more than to identify all of these remains and return them to their families. However, the current OCME resources cannot bear the cost of having forensic genetic genealogy completed on all of our open cases of unidentified remains. Our budget, including salaries, benefits, operations, and testing is \$3.1M. While we're finding free, or inexpensive ways to move our unidentified cases forward, we recognize that means things take more time. A fiscal note was submitted to the Office of Fiscal and Program Review (OFPR) for \$100,000 to start the testing, with an additional \$9 - 18,000K required annually. We ask that if this bill is approved, the fiscal note also be approved. The approval of the bill, without funding will result in the OCME being unable to comply with statute.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lindsey Chasteen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Lindsey" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Chasteen".

Lindsey Chasteen, MBA
Office Administrator