

C-28	Replace Coroner with Medical Examiner	Rohrer, Milewski, O'Leary	Article 3, Section 3.65
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Changes the current Coroner to Medical Examiner

Sponsor of Proposal

Commissioners Loujanna Rohrer, Brenda Milewski, Jerome O'Leary

Brief Summary of Proposal:

This proposal updates the Pierce County Charter to replace the coroner model with a medical examiner system. It provides that Pierce County shall maintain a medical examiner system in lieu of a coroner system, except where otherwise required by general law. It also provides that the Medical Examiner shall be appointed by the Executive and confirmed by a majority of the Council. The proposal further clarifies that the Medical Examiner must meet the qualifications required by Washington law and perform all duties required by law, the Charter, and county ordinance. Conforming language updates references in the Charter from “Coroner” to “Medical Examiner.”

Proposed Charter Amendment:

Section 3.65 ~~Coroner~~ Medical Examiner

~~There is hereby created the executive department of Coroner.
The Coroner shall be appointed by the Executive and confirmed by a majority of the Council.~~

There is hereby created the executive department of Medical Examiner.

Pierce County shall maintain a medical examiner system in lieu of a coroner system and shall not operate a coroner system except as otherwise required by general law.

The Medical Examiner shall be appointed by the Executive and confirmed by a majority of the Council.

The Medical Examiner shall possess the qualifications required by Washington law and shall perform all duties required by general law, this Charter, and county ordinance, including the investigation of deaths within the jurisdiction of the office and the determination and certification of cause and manner of death.

Pierce County policy is that medicolegal death investigations be conducted through a professional, independent, medically and scientifically grounded system consistent with modern forensic standards, justice, public safety, and public confidence.

Conforming Amendment

All references in the Pierce County Charter to “Coroner” shall be replaced with “Medical Examiner,” and any reference to the office of Coroner shall mean the office of Medical Examiner unless the context clearly requires otherwise.

Rationale for Proposal

Pierce County already uses a medical examiner system, but the Charter still reflects an outdated coroner model. Pierce County is a large and growing county, with an estimated population of 946,288 as of July 1, 2025. Washington law specifically authorizes counties with populations of 250,000 or more to adopt a medical examiner system in place of a coroner system.

Pierce County already operates a Medical Examiner’s Office, not a coroner’s office. The County’s official website states that the office “operates by the authority of the laws of the State of Washington” to determine cause and manner of death and investigate deaths within its jurisdiction. Pierce County converted from the elected coroner model to a professional medical examiner system on January 21, 1984, so this amendment would update the Charter to reflect more than 42 years of actual county practice.

Given the size of Pierce County and the number and types of deaths that occur here each year, it is important that death investigations be led by a trained medical professional with the qualifications required by Washington law. RCW 36.24.190 provides that, in counties adopting this model, the medical examiner must meet specific medical qualifications.

Pierce County’s Medical Examiner’s Office states that it applies modern medical and forensic science through highly trained technical staff and provides an independent assessment of death. This amendment supports accurate, professional, and scientifically grounded death investigations that promote truth, dignity for the

deceased and their families, justice, public safety, and public confidence. Although this is a technical amendment, it is important for operational clarity, legal consistency, and public trust. This amendment aligns the Charter with Washington State law, Pierce County's longstanding medical examiner model, current county operations, modern forensic standards, and the need for operational clarity, legal consistency, and public confidence.

DPA Review of Proposal

Date:

4/2/2026

Proposal No.:

C-28

Topic:

Medical Examiner

DPA:

Katie Blinn

Legal Review:

The proposal changes the position of Coroner to Medical Examiner. These changes are within the authority of a charter county.

Other Feedback/Comments/Recommendations:

In 1996, the Legislature authorized counties to switch from elected coroners to appointed medical examiners. See [RCW 36.24.190](#). Many statutes in Title 36.24 RCW describing the duties and responsibilities of the office use both terms: "The coroner or medical examiner must ..."

Summary Points

Submit written testimony

By Email: katey.hobbs@piercecountywa.gov

By Web Form: <https://www.piercecountywa.gov/FormCenter/Charter-Review-41/Provide-Written-Public-Comment-893>

Submitted public testimony

Names in **RED** = CON

Names in **GREEN** = PRO

As of 3-20-26 = **0 CON** ~ **0 PRO**

Packet
