



**ARAPAHOE COUNTY**  
COLORADO'S FIRST

## Office of the Coroner

13101 E. Broncos Parkway  
Centennial, Colorado 80112  
Phone: 720-874-3625  
Fax: 720-874-3627  
Relay Colorado: 711  
www.arapahoegov.com  
coroner@arapahoegov.com

27 October 2022

To the Board of County Commissioners,

**KELLY LEAR, M.D.**  
Coroner

Per request, I am submitting this formal letter requesting a discussion of my salary pending my re-election to the position of Coroner, effective January 9, 2023.

As set forth in Colorado Revised Statutes Section 30-2-102, the 2023 salary of Category I-A county coroners was increased to \$131,701 over the previously set salary of \$120,485. CRS Section 30-2-108 further allows for the Board of County Commissioners to provide for additional compensation to a county coroner who performs post-mortem examinations (as qualified to perform medicolegal autopsies as a forensic pathologist pursuant to CRS 30-10-606.5). As you are all aware, I am a medical doctor and am board-certified in forensic pathology as required under 30-10-606.5. I perform forensic post-mortem examinations for the Arapahoe County Coroner's Office, and have served Arapahoe County in this capacity since 2004; additionally I have served as the appointed-then-elected Coroner since 2014. With the combined duties of Coroner as well as those of Forensic Pathologist, my current yearly salary was set at \$268,000 in 2018, which has fallen behind market in the past two years. If I am re-elected as Coroner, I would request my yearly salary to be set at \$320,000 through January 2027, which represents the end of the elected term.

I have provided some background data for the job market for forensic pathologists; although HR performs salary surveys for our local market, the job market for forensic pathologists extends nationwide, with only approximately 700 board-certified forensic pathologists available to cover an estimated 1000+ potential jobs. When evaluating my role as Coroner and forensic pathologist, there are two equivalent positions within the State of Colorado—forensic pathologists who perform post-mortem examinations while also serving as the elected Coroner (El Paso County) or appointed Chief Medical Examiner (Denver County). Dr. James Caruso is the appointed Chief ME in Denver County, who was hired January 1, 2014 and has a current (2022) annual salary of \$338,187.91. Dr. Leon Kelly is the elected Coroner in El Paso County (first elected in 2018); Dr. Kelly currently has a salary of \$290,000 and he is finalizing negotiations with his county to receive a salary of approximately \$318,000 upon his re-election. These are local examples of current salaries in my field and can be confirmed by human resources, and it is on these positions combined with prior and expected market increases that I base my salary request.

The nationwide shortage of forensic pathologists has been amplified by the fentanyl overdose epidemic; this scarcity of qualified physicians is reflected in salary ranges of forensic pathologists in markets both small and large. Nationwide, county government medical examiner and coroner's offices are advertising for forensic pathologists with no experience outside of fellowship and no administrative/director responsibilities at starting yearly salaries of \$225,000 to \$270,000; and many

jobs advertised in 2022 are touting salaries of \$246,008 - \$388,813 for non-Chief/non-administrative forensic pathologists. In 2022, offices hiring Chief Medical Examiners (the equivalent to my position as Coroner/Forensic Pathologist) have advertised widely variable salaries ranging from \$280,000 to \$521,000.

I would be happy to provide more information or engage in further discussion as needed. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KCLear MD'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the initials 'KCL' being prominent and 'Ears MD' following in a smaller, more connected script.

Kelly C. Lear M.D.